

PREPARING YOUR CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY

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With regard to the content of your testimony, I have become aware that many of us don't really understand what a testimony is, what it should contain, or why it is necessary. Also, I have heard some incorrect thinking about testimony preparation. Please let me talk about this for a minute or two to help you in this task. There are four areas I would like to cover: the purpose of your testimony, what content it needs to have to be effective, the style with which you present it, and the needed preparation.

A prerequisite to all of this is prayer! Ask God for the wisdom to recognize what your experience actually has been, what of that to include in your testimony, and how to share it effectively. He will.

Purpose - Your testimony is *your* story of how you came to Christ and how He has been active in your life. It can serve two purposes. The primary one is to share your story as a tool for leading a person (or people) to turn from their sin and put their trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That must be the focus. Lead them to *turn from sin* and *receive Jesus as Lord!* Secondly, you may also use your story to help a struggling or wayward believer to walk more closely with Jesus.

Content - Please note that you are *not* leading people to God. You are leading them to God *through* repentance and trust in *Jesus Christ -- God the Son*. You may not want to think so, but the *accuracy of the theology* expressed in your testimony can make a difference in whether or not a person decides to trust Christ. It can also make a difference in how quickly they move on to become faithful *disciples* of Jesus. Many people who are not Christians believe in "our God", but they have no idea that God became man who dwelt among us and became a sacrifice for their sin by dying on the cross. They have no idea that He did in fact rise from the grave to reign as their Lord and that, by turning from their sin and yielding to His Lordship, they can know fullness of joy and peace in every circumstance. Your testimony needs to get at these things so they have a *reason* to turn from their sin and trust Him. It needs to touch on *every point* in the attached instructions. Thus, you need to tell them about Jesus Christ; not just about God.

In your testimony, you are using your story to do lead people to Christ. They need to know enough about your mistakes – your sin – to know whether what you are saying relates to them, their situation and their sinfulness. You do not need to go into detail about your sin and you certainly don't want to make it sound inviting, but you need to say enough about it so your audience (one person or a thousand) knows you are real and can relate to you. Also, be careful not to give Satan any credit. You didn't sin because of him. You sinned because you are a sinner. Own up to it.

Once you have related to them, you must share *how* you came to realize that you needed to surrender yourself to Christ, including your understanding of what He did for you and why. You must also tell them *how* you put your trust in Him – the mechanics. Presumably, you prayed. Roughly, what did you say to Jesus? Again presumably, you confessed to Him that you were a sinner and could not do anything to undo that, that you believed that He came here and died on the cross in your place, that He rose from the grave, that He is alive and wants to forgive your sin and give you real life. Presumably, you surrendered yourself to Him – turned yourself over to Him – willing for Him to direct your life, and you asked Him to forgive your sin and make you what He wants. Tell them this so they have a clear understanding of how to trust Christ and what you will be leading them to say when they give you the opportunity to lead them in the sinner's prayer.

Your goal in sharing your testimony is to help your hearers *surrender* to Christ's Lordship – to receive Him as Lord. None of this "ask Jesus into your heart" stuff! They are sinners who need to repent and give Jesus His rightful place as ruler of their lives. Asking Jesus "into your heart" doesn't accomplish this and results in people thinking they are saved when they are not! There are tons of scriptures indicating the need for people to turn from sin and yield to Jesus as Lord. I have only found one that says anything about asking Jesus into your heart. Let's major accurately on what the *Bible* majors on. This is what God will bless.

Style - All of this so far has touched on the content of your testimony. You can do a great job of preparing a clear and accurate story, but if you fail to deliver it believably, you likely will not have the joy of leading anyone to Christ and they will have to live in their sin longer than necessary. Jesus is not boring. He never bored anyone. You shouldn't either! You must think deeply not only about the content and truthfulness of your testimony, but also about *how* you will *share* or *deliver* it. You want it to be a tasty meal that your hearers will want to consume and digest. Thus, you must make notes within your testimony that will help you to give it with style and enthusiasm so that it will have maximum impact of your audience.

Preparation - There is an idea going around that you should not write out your testimony, but simply follow your heart when given the opportunity to witness. Baloney! This apparently comes from a misunderstanding about what Jesus said in Matthew 10:17-20 (NIV):

"Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

This applies, as Jesus said, to "when they arrest you", not to general witnessing. The passage is in the context of Jesus instructing the Apostles before he sent them out two by two to witness. Just before He said this, He also said:

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." Matthew 10:16 (NIV)

Part of being shrewd as snakes involves preparation. Scripture clearly teaches this. We have all memorized 2nd Timothy 2:15:

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (NIV)

Also:

"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. *1st Timothy 4:13-16 (NIV)*

Preparation is necessary to being diligent so you give God the sharpest tool possible for Him to use. He can be trusted to guard your testimony so that He can use it as He desires. The following outline can be used to help you formulate your Christian testimony and to sharpen it for use in short time slots and in third world situations.

PREPARING YOUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY FOR USE AT HOME AND ABROAD

- I. Initial Preparation
- A. Describe briefly who you were and what you were like before trusting Jesus Christ.
 - 1. What was your life like?
 - 2. What made you ready to hear about Jesus?
 - 3. *Don't* glorify your sin or exalt the devil.
 - B. Describe *how* you came to know about Jesus and *how* to have a relationship with Him.
 - C. Describe how you actually did put your trust in Jesus Christ.
 - 1. Were you by yourself?
 - 2. How did you ask Jesus to forgive your sin?
 - 3. What thoughts were included in your prayer?
 - D. Describe briefly how your life has been since you trusted Christ.
 - 1. Don't sugar-coat it.
 - 2. Include spiritual growth and discipleship understanding.
 - E. Tell them *how* they can repent and put their trust in Jesus. Offer to lead them.
 - 1. Remember that this is a volitional *decision*.
 - 2. *Avoid* talking about "asking Jesus to come into your heart."
- C. Change all *churchy* words and idioms. Make it hearer-friendly.
- D. Correct grammar, etc.
- E. Give testimony to team and let them critique for use in the States.
- III. Shorten it up. This version (Version B) will be good when you have little time.
- A. This version should be short enough to share in five minutes or less.
 - B. Take out all non-essential elements.
 - C. Give testimony to team and let them critique for use in the States and for adequacy.
- IV. Make both versions (Versions C and D) *third-worldy*.
- A. Imagine that your audience lives in mud or bamboo huts with no running water, no electricity. They may never have seen cars, or white people for that matter. They don't have any concept of a mall or a supermarket or an office. Some may not even know what a store is, or a TV. Adjust your description to accommodate their level of understanding.
 - B. Carefully review your testimony to identify all idioms. Change the wording to eliminate them and still convey the message.
 - C. Give testimonies to team and let them critique for use in third-world.
- Versions A and B will be useful in the States and some European and Asian countries. Versions C and D should be used in third-world countries.
- II. Polish it up. This version (Version A) will be good when you have reasonable time.
- A. Make sure description *flows* logically.
 - B. Take out extraneous thoughts. Stick to the meat.