

Personal Testimony Workshop

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Objective – To help you feel better equipped to share the story of God’s work in your life with others.

What is a personal testimony?

It has many names:

Your Testimony, Your Personal Testimony, Your Salvation Story, Your “My Story”, Your Story of Grace, How I Received Eternal Life, among others.

What is it?

Your personal testimony is a three-part story of

1. Your life before Christ
2. How you came to know Jesus as your personal Savior
3. Your life since inviting Christ into your heart

How long should it be?

It’s good to have at ready three basic versions, a 30-second, a 4-minute and a 20-minute testimony. We will be focusing on developing **the 4-minute testimony**.

What’s its purpose?

The purpose of your testimony is to witness to unbelievers, not other Christians. It’s a tool that is used to open a dialog about Jesus. Remember that *you’re not telling your life story* – you’re telling an unbeliever how Jesus changed your life, in the hope that the unbeliever will want to know more about Jesus, not about you. The idea is that *Jesus is the hero* of everyone’s story of salvation.

Can people argue or disagree with your testimony?

Not really. It’s your story filled with factual, historical events surrounding how you were completely remade supernaturally (justified) as promised in scripture (2Cor. 5:17), and are being transformed by the Holy Spirit (sanctified). Through it, you are telling the indisputable truth about God’s mercy and grace, and how it’s available to everyone. It may be the only time your listener ever hears the gospel.

What’s the goal?

The goal is that at the end of your four minutes, your listener will have a clear idea of what happened to you – and what could happen to him. In other words: You are being asked to tell how you met God on His terms, while the listener, an unbeliever, knows nothing about Jesus dying for them, so that at the end of these four minutes, he would clearly understand the gospel, it would make sense to him, and he would know how to get right with God based solely on what you’ve shared.

Why is it a BIG DEAL?

A personal testimony is the story of the single most important encounter in a person's life. It is the story of how, when, where and why they met God on His terms. Getting right with God is a BIG DEAL. Confessing one's sins and having them forgiven and the soul cleansed of all unrighteousness IS A BIG DEAL. Being saved from the power and penalty of sin IS A BIG DEAL. Starting a personal relationship with the living God IS A BIG DEAL. This life-changing experience and eternal consequence of choosing to give your life to Jesus IS A BIG DEAL! Receiving this, the greatest gift of all, being a totally unworthy recipient of this gift, and knowing that this gift is available to everyone means that being prepared and intentional about sharing this gift with all those who God puts into our lives IS A BIG DEAL!

Where is a personal testimony located in the Bible?

Acts 26. The first personal testimony is made by the Apostle Paul before King Agrippa. Paul's story contains the distinct three sections: 1) Before Christ, how he, as a Pharisee and in his obsession against them, persecuted, imprisoned and sanctioned the deaths of many Christians. 2) How he met Christ on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians in Foreign cities when he saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun blazing around him and his companions. Then Jesus spoke to Saul and appointed him as a servant and as a witness of what he saw and heard, said He would rescue Saul from the Jews and Gentiles, and sent him out 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 Christ (there's the gospel). 3) Life after conversion, how he was not disobedient to the vision from heaven, first to those in Damascus, then Jerusalem, then all Judea and to the Gentiles preaching that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. Paul completed his testimony with Biblical truths from the Old Testament.

Where is the gospel that I can weave into my story?

A good example is in **Titus 3:3-8**. The gospel and your story come together in these verses.

1. Your life before Christ (vs. 3)

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

2. Christ's call on your life (vs. 4-7)

⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

3. Your life after Christ (vs. 8)

⁸This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Why should I develop my personal testimony?

Why do we prepare and sharpen our testimony?

1. **Jesus told us to** in the Great Commission: Matthew 28: 18-20: *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* Sharing your personal testimony with unbelievers is one of the powerful ways to help make disciples and fulfill the Great Commission.

2. *The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.*" If you are commanded to love your neighbor as yourself, are you to love just your neighbor's life on earth only, or also his eternal soul promised to live out eternity in either heaven or hell.

3. The apostle Peter challenges us, "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). One of the most effective tools you have for sharing your faith is the story of how Jesus Christ gave you eternal life and how He has enriched your life. The apostle John wrote, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard" (1 John 1:3). John was testifying about his relationship with Jesus Christ.

4. The apostle Paul tells us that before giving our lives to Christ, although we knew Him in a worldly way, "we do so no longer." He says in 1 Corinthians 5:17-20: Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come. All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."

Many people are not ready to be convinced that they need Christ, but can often be open to talk about the gospel after an inoffensive telling of a salvation story. Many people have come to Christ simply because others like you have sharpened their story. It is an effective way to prepare "to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

How can I prepare and sharpen my story?

Prayer - Trust God and work hard. Give time, thought and prayer to this important part of your discipleship training. Ask the Lord for wisdom and insight into just how to share your story.

Write it out -

Methods can include initially writing 1st, 2nd and 3rd drafts, not to memorize it and give it verbatim; it's to help you put into words some of the important and interesting details of your conversion. The choice of the right words, the flow of your story, and knowing how to begin and end are all important. The number of drafts and amount of time and effort it takes each person to prepare his or her story can vary greatly. This has little to do with intelligence or spirituality; it has everything to do with the complexity of some people's stories.

Once you have what you believe to be a final draft, it is helpful to then transfer the draft to 3x5 index cards, and practice giving it to a friend to become familiar with your verbal delivery.

This process leads to a final distilling your index cards to an outline on one index card. It works well to develop on this one card 6-8 bullet points, 2 or 3 for each of the three segments, that you will ALWAYS include in your story, whether it is the 30-second, the 4-minute or the 20-minute version. This helps you focus on the important things. Think of those bullets as the skeleton of your story, on which you can hang more and more flesh as time allows. Another way to look at those bullets is to think of them as pegs on a wall, on which you can hang more or less material. But make sure those points are always in your story. This will keep you from running down rabbit trails and eventually losing your narrative.

The outline for your story - When the apostle Paul stood before King Agrippa (Acts 26), he spoke simply, logically and clearly about his life before salvation, how he met Christ, and what his life was like after conversion. Paul's story takes three or four minutes to read aloud in conversational manner. Here is Paul's outline in Acts 26:

| | |
|----------------|--------------|
| Lead-in/BEFORE | Verses 2-11 |
| HOW | Verses 12-20 |
| AFTER/close | Verses 21-29 |

The lead-in and close is not generally written out and included in your outline as they will vary greatly with each person you give your testimony to and the situation.

Guidelines for preparing the more specific content -

1. *Make it sound conversational.* Avoid literary-sounding statements. Use informal language.
2. *Share; don't preach.* Say "I" and "me" not "you". This keeps your story warm and personal.
3. *Avoid religious words, phrases, and jargon.*
4. *Generalize so more people can identify with your story.* It is better to not name specific churches, denominations, or groups. Avoid using dates and ages.
5. *Include some humor and human interest.* When your listener smiles or laughs, it reduces tension. Humor is disarming and increases attention.
6. *One or two word pictures increase interest.* Don't just say, "Pat shared the gospel with me." You might briefly describe the setting so a person listening can visualize.
7. Explain how Christ met or is meeting needs in your life, but *avoid implying that your struggles and problems ended at conversion.*
8. *Sound adult, not juvenile.* Reflect an adult point of view even if you were converted at an early age.
9. *Avoid dogmatic and mystical statements that skeptics can question,* such as "I prayed and God gave me a job." Or "God said to me..."
10. *Simplify; reduce "clutter."* Mention a limited number of people and use only their first and last names. Combine information when you can.
 - a. Poor: "Martha Smith, Nancy Van Buren, and her cousin Jane Matthews came by my office at Digital Binary Components Corporation."
 - b. Good: "Martha and two other friends talked with me at work one day."
 - c. Good: "After living in five states and attending six universities, I finally graduated and got an engineering job."

Developing your before, how, and after - Here are practical suggestions for developing the *before*, *how*, and *after* parts of your story.

1. Before:

- a. When non-Christians identify with your background, their interest grows. In your testimony, you can share one or more gaps or needs that characterized your pre-Christian life. Following are some common non-Christian life patterns or traits:

- No peace
- Fear of death
- can't shake bad habits
- boredom
- loneliness
- no meaning to life
- guilt
- something missing
- emptiness
- no purpose
- depression
- dissatisfied with life

- b. Non-Christians may ignore or try to get rid of uncomfortable personal needs. Often their "solutions" don't work. As you develop your story, you might list positive as well as negative solutions that you tried, avoiding being graphic or detailed about sinful behavior. Consider touching on one or two items such as these:

- Marriage/family
- Sports/fitness
- Hobbies/entertainment
- Work
- Money
- Intimacy
- Drugs/alcohol
- Education
- Wrong friends

2. How:

- a. Describe circumstances that caused you to consider Christ. Perhaps identify events that led to your conversion. This may have taken place over a period of time.
- b. Briefly explain the specific steps you took to become a Christian. If there is a particular passage of Scripture that applies here, you may want to use it.
- c. Include the gospel clearly and briefly. The gospel includes:

1. All have sinned (Romans 3:23)
2. Sin's penalty (Romans 6:26)
3. Christ paid the penalty (1 Peter 3:18)
4. Must receive Christ (John 1:12)

3. After:

- a. Review the needs or life patterns you shared in your *before*. How has Christ helped or healed those sensitive or unpleasant needs? What has changed since becoming a follower of Christ (for example, knowing that your sins are forgiven, new meaning and purpose in life, assurance of salvation, or other ways your outlook has changed)?
- b. Conclude with a one-sentence statement about your confidence of having eternal life. The person you talk to will tend to comment on or remember the last thing you say.

Personal Testimony Workshop Worksheet

Following is a list of questions for an Adult Conversion salvation story. Please jot down some of your thoughts under each question. This provides you a rough outline from which you can write sentences and paragraphs about your own experiences. This can help you put together your first draft of your story.

BEFORE:

1. Before you met Christ, what were some of your needs, what was lacking, or what was missing in your life?

2. What solutions for your life did you try that didn't work?

HOW:

1. What were the circumstances that caused you to consider Christ?

2. Tell how you trusted Christ, and briefly include the gospel.

AFTER:

1. Give an example of how Christ met your needs or how He is now contributing to your life.

2. End with a sentence to the effect that you know that you have eternal life through Christ.

Supplemental Material -

THREE FORMATS FOR YOUR STORY

Check the box that best fits your own story and fill in the worksheet for that format. Read the condensed sample salvation story that applies to your format and fill out the worksheet. Later, on your own, as you write the first draft of your story, you may find it helpful to refer to the sample story and its worksheet that you filled out

FORMAT 1: ADULT CONVERSION

You trusted Christ as an adult. You have a distinct *before*, *how* and *after*.

FORMAT 2: EARLY CONVERSION / ADULT DEEPER COMMITMENT

You need to evaluate whether the early-conversion experience was genuine. If you conclude that it was not, then you might use Format 1 as your model. If it was genuine, your life may have been characterized by spiritual immaturity or a lifestyle similar to people without faith in Christ.

FORMAT 3: EARLY CONVERSION / CONSISTENT GROWTH

You probably grew up with Christian parents and have a strong church background. You might have very little *before* to share. (Often the “overview/flashback way to organize your story works well with this format, in which, different from the chronological before, how and after method, you start your story with the *after* up to the present and then flash back to the *before* or to just preceding the *how*.)

FORMAT 1: ADULT CONVERSION

BEFORE

A few years ago, I found myself lacking purpose in my life. Something was missing. Nothing seemed to fill the void. I had majored in electrical engineering in college and got a good job when I graduated. For three years, I put in extra hours and finally got a promotion, but I had no real satisfaction in that. I began working longer and longer hours, giving myself to my profession. This began to have a negative effect on me. I kept telling my wife that I was only doing it for her and the kids, but I knew that was a rationalization. What started out as the ‘ideal’ marriage was coming apart at the seams. I got to the point that I did not want to go home at night. “Happy hour” was more fun than arguments.

HOW

In my next job, I was asked to attend an engineering seminar with David and Jack from work. David seemed to have a certain something that was missing in my life. On the way home from the seminar, David told me about how Christ had changed his life and had given him a whole new reason for living. Many of the things he said seemed to be similar to my situation. He talked about having been successful in business, but somehow he fell short of what he wanted out of life. Then he said that the answer to his frustration was to have personally committed his life to Jesus Christ. In a prayer, he’d admitted to God that he had done many things that he knew were very wrong. He had turned control of his life over to God. David told me that the Bible said that Christ had died on the cross so we could be forgiven for everything we had ever done wrong. I had heard this before, but now it seemed to make a lot more sense. A couple of days after the seminar, I took a walk down by the lake near our home. I prayed and confessed to God some of the things I had done that I knew had hurt and displeased him. I asked Christ to come into my life and take over because I wasn’t doing a very good job with it by myself.

AFTER

Well, there was no flash of light or strong emotion, but I do know that I felt as if a large weight was lifted from my shoulders. Not everything is perfect now, but I do feel as if I

have a whole new purpose for living. God has given me more stability and purpose. It is now very important to me to know that I will be with God after this life.

FORMAT 2:

EARLY CONVERSION / ADULT DEEPER COMMITMENT

BEFORE FULL
COMMITMENT

Not too long ago, you could have characterized my life as lacking any real inner peace. Everything around me seemed to be in utter turmoil. Nothing I did would ease the tension in my life. It didn't seem as if anything could fill the longing that was growing in my heart. I thought I could fill that emptiness by getting involved in activities I joined a health spa, took golf lessons, and was involved in transporting our children to their various sports and lessons. I considered going back to work part-time. Then my husband received a promotion and we were transferred to another city. If I had felt tension before, the move just added to its intensity. It seemed that the only relief I found was from taking tranquilizers, but that was only temporary, and it scared me to realize that I was beginning to depend on them.

HOW

We had gotten out of the habit of attending church over the years, but the Johnsons invited us to go to church with them, so we started going. After we had attended for a couple of months, we decided to participate in a Bible study group. There we met people who were fun, but took their Christianity seriously. They began to encourage us to really commit our lives to Christ.

We reviewed some things I had heard while growing up: that we are all breaking God's laws and deserved to be separated from Him, but that God provided the way to restore that relationship with Him and that provision was the death of His only Son, Jesus Christ. What I needed to do about it was to acknowledge my disobedience to God and turn from it and ask Christ to take over my life as my Savior and Lord. So I asked Christ to apply His death to me and take over.

AFTER

It wasn't until we got involved in that Wednesday night Bible study that I really understood what it meant to be committed to Jesus Christ. I was learning that I couldn't experience inner peace while neglecting God. As a result of the Bible study, I made a whole new commitment to Christ. The inner peace that I was striving for so desperately was finally there. But the greatest thing of all is that I know for certain that I have a personal relationship with God through Christ and have eternal life.

FORMAT 3:

EARLY CONVERSION / CONSISTANT GROWTH

BEFORE

As a single person, I see other singles feverishly trying to put together a happy, fulfilling life. They are into travel; some try the bar scene, dating, high-tech toys, sports and even substance abuse. I also see married men and women (where I work) trying to put their lives together without really knowing how. I'm involved in many of the same social activities as other singles. I enjoy working out and running. I save up my money to take short overseas trips when I find a good price. But I have a contentment and stability that elude many people. This new stability began in my life during high school.

HOW

As I was growing up, my parents were very active in church. Because they were active, they figured that I should be also, so every Sunday, there we were. It was real for them, but for me it was just socializing with friends. Then one summer I attended church camp. This changed my whole view of "religion." I discovered at this camp that Christianity was more than just a religion; it was a personal relationship with God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Some of the discussion groups centered around who Jesus Christ was and what He did. One day after sports, my camp counselor asked me if I had ever personally committed

my life to Christ, or was I still thinking about it. We reviewed some key Bible verses about steps I could take to establish a meaningful relationship with God through Christ. From the Bible, I saw that I needed forgiveness and that God was offering the gift of eternal life. I put my trust in Jesus Christ's death on the cross for me. I said a prayer right there and asked Jesus to apply his death on the cross to me personally.

AFTER

AS I grew physically and mentally, I also grew spiritually. I find that when I try to do things my way and leave God out of the picture, I have the same struggles as everyone else. But when I let Him be in control, I experience a stability that can only come from Him. The contentment that I am experiencing through my relationship with God has impacted my job performance in positive ways and has helped me be less self-centered. But the greatest benefit is knowing that I have eternal life through Christ.

**WORKSHEET – FORMAT 1:
ADULT CONVERSION**

Following is a list of questions for an Adult Conversion salvation story. Please jot down some of your thoughts under each question. This provides you a rough outline from which you can write sentences and paragraphs about your own experiences. This can help you put together your first draft of your story.

BEFORE:

1. Before you met Christ, what were some of your needs, what was lacking, or what was missing in your life?

2. What solutions for your life did you try that didn't work?

HOW:

1. What were the circumstances that caused you to consider Christ?

2. Tell how you trusted Christ, and briefly include the gospel.

AFTER:

1. Give an example of how Christ met your needs or how He is now contributing to your life.

2. End with a sentence to the effect that you know that you have eternal life through Christ.

**WORKSHEET – FORMAT 2:
EARLY CONVERSION / DEEPER ADULT COMMITMENT**

Following is a list of questions for an Early Conversion / Deeper Adult Commitment salvation story. Please jot down some of your thoughts under each question. This provides you a rough outline from which you can write sentences and paragraphs about your own experiences. This can help you put together your first draft of your story.

BEFORE:

1. Before your new commitment to Christ, what were some of your needs, what was lacking, or what was missing in your life?

2. What solutions for your life did you try that didn't work?

HOW:

1. What were the circumstances that led you to make the deeper commitment to Christ?

2. Refer to your conversion experience, when you put your faith in Christ, and briefly include the gospel.

AFTER:

1. Give an example of how Christ met your needs or contributing to your life now.

2. End with a sentence to the effect that you know that you have eternal life through Christ.

**WORKSHEET – FORMAT 3:
EARLY CONVERSION / CONSISTENT GROWTH**

Following is a list of questions for an Early Conversion / Consistent Growth salvation story. Please jot down some of your thoughts under each question. This provides you a rough outline from which you can write sentences and paragraphs about your own experiences. This can help you put together your first draft of your story.

BEFORE:

1. What were some needs or things missing that you have observed in other people?

2. What solutions do you see that aren't working for people?

HOW:

1. Explain how your relationship with God through Christ has made many of these things less of a problem for you.

2. Refer to your conversion experience. Briefly including the gospel, state how you trusted Christ.

AFTER:

1. Give an example of how Christ is meeting your needs or contributing to your life.

2. End with a sentence to the effect that you know that you have eternal life through Christ.

Lead-in to “My Story”

You have worked hard sharpening your salvation story. Questions might come to mind: “When do I share it?” How do I direct the conversation so it will lead into telling ‘My Story’?” Here are some suggestions (you are being wise and sensitive, not manipulative):

1. Include some small talk before discussing spiritual matters, i.e. family, job, hobbies, interests, and so on.
2. Be alert for needs expressed. Their felt need might become the basis for further discussion. Often being a good listener leads to being able to share your story.
3. Discuss past concerns and needs that you had in your life, such as, “We used to struggle in our marriage relationship” or “I used to allow the pressures at work to get to me, and then I discovered something that made a tremendous difference in my life.”
4. Discuss contemporary situations happening in the news or in your area: “Recently I watched a video clip that showed the extent of substance abuse in small towns in America. It seems that people are trying to find something that satisfies. People on the video explained how they slipped into that lifestyle. “Avoid topics that lead to taking sides and arguing.

Build genuine friendships with them. It may take ten minutes, ten days, or ten months, but the investment of time can build a friendship.

6. Don’t condemn them for behaving like non-Christians; they *are* non-Christians. You can be a friend without the engaging in their marginal activities. As they continue to observe your life, they will see more and more how they can have a better life in Christ.
7. Avoid dogmatic “religious” statements, such as “God told me to _____” or “Jesus is the answer to all your problems.” They don’t yet know who He is, much less what He can do in their lives.
8. Avoid arguments on moral issues. You can expect non-Christians’ views to conflict with clear biblical teaching. After their commitment to Christ, a biblical foundation can be established.

Ways to close “My Story”

When you have shared your salvation story, you may want to conclude with a statement that causes the person to reflect on what you just shared. What you will say depends on how the person has been responding to your testimony. If his response seems negative or neutral, you could say something like one of the following:

1. “Well, that’s my story. Christ has really changed my life. Where are you in your thinking about God?”
2. “Have you wondered much about how a person can have eternal life?”
3. “If you are interest, maybe we could discuss this a little more sometime.”

If his response seems positive, you could ask one of these questions:

- a. “Bill, has anything like this ever happened to you?”
- b. “John, do you know for certain whether you have eternal life?”
- c. “What have you heard about Christ’s death on the cross?”
- d. “May I share an illustration with you that explains how a person can know for certain that they have eternal life?” (Perhaps use the Bridge Illustration if he says yes.)