

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR PERSONAL SALVATION TESTIMONY

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WHY PREPARE A PERSONAL TESTIMONY?

Peter challenges us in I Peter 3:15 to "...*always be ready* to give an answer to everyone who asks you to *give* the reason for the hope you have, but do this with gentleness and respect". One of the most effective tools you have for sharing your faith is your story of how Jesus Christ gave you eternal life and how He has enriched your life. I John 1:3.

In Acts 26, Paul takes about **four minutes** to tell King Agrippa very simply, logically and clearly his life **before** salvation, **how** he met Christ, and his life **after** his rebirth.

The *purpose* of writing it out is not to memorize it and *give* it verbatim. You want to express your experience with words so the 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 very, very important! One aim is to reduce an outline of your personal salvation testimony to a 3 X 5 card.

You *will* want to share as if everyone who hears you is a Pre-Christian. You never know how God will use what you say to encourage, give assurance, convict, or draw to salvation. You do your part and He will do His.

PAUL'S EXAMPLE

In the Book of Acts, Paul twice shares his personal testimony and gives us some good examples to learn from in developing our own testimonies. The first occasion in which Paul shared his testimony occurred before a mob of people who were trying to kill him. An account of this is found in Acts 22. Paul's second opportunity to share his testimony is in the presence of King Agrippa and Festus, the Roman governor. This incident is seen in Acts 26. In each instance Paul divided his story into three parts.

- What life was like before he came to Christ,
- How he came to Christ,
- How Christ changed his life.

YOUR LIFE BEFORE CHRIST

The objective is to arouse interest in your non-Christian listeners by causing them to *identify* with you.

An effective way to share these areas of need is to aim for an "open nerve" that is common to most of us. Just as an exposed nerve in a bad tooth will cause you to react when it is touched, so all of us have certain basic emotional or psychological "open nerves" that are sensitive to the touch. Listed below are some common "open nerve" areas typical to most non-Christians:

No peace
Guilt
Fear of death
Boredom
Depression
Dissatisfaction with life

No meaning in life
Inability to live up to God's
moral standards
Worry
Gripped by sinful habits
Loneliness

No happiness
No purpose
Fear of God's
Anger
Emptiness
Judgment

One or several of these needs may have characterized *your* life as a non-Christian. You will be able to better identify with your listeners if you build the first section of your testimony around one or more of these "open nerves".

1. List three "open nerves" that affected your life **before** you came to Christ.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

2. What specific incidents or examples can you think of from your life that illustrates these three "open nerve" areas?

- a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

THE CONVERSION EXPERIENCE

This is the pivotal point of your story, and it tells specifically *how you received Christ*. Remember these points as you consider this section:

- 1. The Gospel should be brought out clearly enough in your narration that the hearer would know how to receive Christ himself.
- 2. It is effective to use one or two verses that were influential in your conversion or that clearly present the Gospel.
- 3. Be careful to avoid religious language that will confuse or be meaningless to a non-Christian - i.e. "saved", "grace", "washed in the Blood", etc.

Date and place of your conversion: _____

What convinced you to receive Christ? _____

How did you come to know Christ? _____

What **verses** stood out to you at the time? _____

YOUR TESTIMONY -- AFTER CHRIST

This section of your testimony should tell something of what has changed in your life since coming to know Christ: the blessing of sins forgiven, assurance of salvation, new meaning and purpose in life, or other ways your outlook has changed.

Consider the following suggestions:

Review the "open nerve" areas you shared in the "Before" portion. Think about how Christ healed those sensitive and unpleasant needs.

Don't present an unrealistic or idealistic picture of the Christian life. Remember that Jesus is sovereignty in control of our lives and with us in each situation we face.

Don't start preaching! Continue using first person personal pronouns: "I", "Me", -- not "you".

What happened immediately after you received Christ? (Was the change immediate or gradual?)

How did Christ heal your "open nerves"? _____

What are some actual incidents you can use to illustrate your point? _____

Were there any specific Scripture verses, suggestions, or helps that caused immediate growth in your Christian life?

GUIDELINES FOR PREPARING CONTENT:

1. Make it conversational using informal vocabulary.

2. Say "I" and "We" not "You". People like to hear your story in first person.
3. Avoid religious words, phrases, and jargon.

| Religious Words | Possible Substitutions |
|--------------------------------|--|
| "Believe" or "Accepted Christ" | I <i>prayed</i> and invited Christ into my life. |
| "Sin" | Disobeyed God's law, turned my back on God, or rebelled. |
| "Went forward...." | I Decided to turn my life over to God. |
| "Saved" | Became a Christian or accepted God's forgiveness. |
| "Christian" | Christ-follower, real Christian, or committed Christian. |

4. Generalize so more people can identify with your story. Don't name specific denominations or churches; avoid dates and dates.
5. Include human interest or humor. A smile will help people relax and increase attention.
6. One or two brief word pictures increases interest. Example: Describe the farm, etc.
7. In the **before**, the good and bad aspects serve as a cushion of non-spiritual material.
 - Good:** "Wanted to excel"; "desire for education"; "concern for others"; or "hardworking";
 - Bad:** "Selfish"; "inferiority complex"; "get ahead at any cost"; "temper"; "greed for money", etc.

CONCLUSION

After you have thoughtfully considered these various aspects of your testimony, try to boil it down to 300 to 400 words which would equate to two to four minutes.

1. Read the testimony several times aloud until all three sections flow together and you are very familiar with what you have written.
2. Practice saying your testimony aloud to yourself.
3. After you have said your testimony several times alone, try giving it to another Christian.
4. Pray that God will give you the opportunity to use your testimony with a non-Christian friend or acquaintance. Pray for boldness to take the opportunity-when it arises. Don't procrastinate!
5. Launch out in faith, even though you may not feel your story is perfected. Remember

God the Holy Spirit is at work both in the heart of your hearer and in your presentation. Without God, the most eloquent delivery will be fruitless. With Him, the most stumbling speaker can be used to draw others to the Savior.

"And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken to thy servant; but I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue. And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? Now, therefore, Go and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say." (Exodus 4:11-12)

PHASEBACK OR OVERVIEW-FLASHBACK METHOD

It is often difficult to relate to the man in the secular world with a testimony of a person who has grown up in a Christian setting and embraced Christ at an early age. The person who has no concept of Christ may find no identifying points as he hears this "juvenile" sounding experience.

To correct this, we can use a testimony called the Phaseback Testimony to help the person who made a decision for Christ in his or her early years.

The Phaseback Testimony **first focuses** on an **overall picture** of what the person had done in his life – such as schooling, marriage, family, job and present position in the world's point of view.

Secondly, the testimony will then **phaseback to the point of conversion at a young age** which demonstrates how the power of Christ affected the individual's decisions as he *grew* and developed his walk with Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, the benefits of conversion and growth can be identified either in self-image struggles, employment decisions, marriage growth, or child rearing.

It will be important, also, when phasing back to **clearly communicate the message of the Gospel** that began its transforming work in the person's life.