

Sermon Series: Authentic Christian Community

Part Two: Sharing Your Faith Journey

Scripture Reading: Acts 26



“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” – Colossians 3:17.

One of the most important things you can do to share Authentic Christian Community with one another is to share your faith journey. You know, what life was like before you found Christ, why you became a Christ follower and how, and what you have been like since. There are several reasons why this is an important thing to do with those who share a common faith.

First of all, we naturally build a bond with those we realize have all been in the same battle, in the next foxhole over, and have come out victorious. Secondly, we learn the real reasons we became Christians, including what we love about Christ. Third, it will build greater respect between us and give us more of a reason to honor one another, and to forgive one another. Fourth, every time you retell the story, it reminds you of where you’ve been and how you got to where you are – it encourages US. Last but not least, we will learn how to articulate our experience in words which can not only be shared with other Christians, but with those outside of Christ too!

Here’s how I want you to be authentic today... I want you to learn how to talk about your faith journey, first with another Christian. And I want you to take time at the end of this lesson to practice it. Yes, practice it! Literally, write it out and remember the greater points of it, so that you may build others up through your story about the greatest person in your life. You need to be able to do this confidently, without shame, so that the gospel can have an impact on others through your journey.

This is our #1 mission as a disciple, you know, to make disciples. We start by building up (or “making”) other Christians stronger by our faith and love toward them, and then we share what we’ve learned and experienced with others outside of the body of Christ. Sure, Jesus can be seen in our love for one another. Yes, we may impact someone’s life through good works. But at some point, you’ll need to use words to give meaning to what people are seeing, and what Christ has done for us -- and that usually happens in private settings or in small groups where it’s easier to be authentic.

Peter wrote, *“Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear,” 1 Peter 3:15.* Did you hear that? Be ready. And for what? To give an answer. For what? For the hope that they see in us being evinced by our faith and love and good works. And is there a manner in which we are to do this? Yes, with meekness and fear. That is, in the strength of being humble yet confident in Jesus.

That’s what Paul did. He just told His story. It begins in Acts 7, goes crazy in Acts 8 & 9, and culminates in a happy ending. But the way he won others to Christ was that he just keeps retelling his story over and over again! Yeah, I know, Jesus came to Him on the road and spoke to Him, blinded him, and sent him packing for Gentile nations. Hard to match that. But does your conversion story involve you walking down the wrong

road, meeting Jesus, and doing a 180? Yes it does. Were you blind but now you see? Uh-huh. The star of Paul's story was not Paul, it was Jesus. And the star of your story is not you, it is Jesus.

When the Apostle Paul stood before King Agrippa in Acts 26, he shared his faith journey by speaking concisely about his life **before** being saved, **how** he was saved, and what his life was like **after** he was saved. His story takes only three or four minutes to read aloud in a conversational manner.

Paul's testimony in Acts 26 is a biblical model you can follow in writing your own personal testimony. Take notes on the highlights of his story that are impactful Paul's **format in Acts 26** is:

Lead-In — Verses 1–3

Before — Verses 4–11

How — Verses 12–20

After — Verses 21–23

Close — Verses 24–29

Wasn't that simple? Don't you think Paul had thought about what he would say before he had that opportunity? He was given a door and he just told his story, the before, how and after.

But who got the glory? Our heavenly father and His son Jesus Christ.

Who knows YOUR story? If you're married does your spouse know your faith walk? Probably. How about your children? They really should! Your friends? If you care about them, yes! And your brothers and sisters in Christ would benefit from knowing how you came to make the most important decision of your life? Can you tell it with some coherence? Do others know who the real hero in your life is when you speak? Is it you, somebody else, or Jesus? It's time you share your story.

Follow the link below to the RESOURCE page on our website, find this lesson under Authentic Christian Community, and print off the pages to begin honing your testimony. Then, share it with your family, your small group, and ask them to tell their story. And maybe, if your ready, you will even share your faith journey with a seeker and win a soul to Christ.

Pray for opportunity and ability, and use the following exercise to sharpen your skills. To God be the glory.

Writing and Practicing Sharing Your Faith Journey

By working through the steps outlined below, and USING THE WORKSHEET to follow, you can sharpen your skills in how to tell others your "testimony," or how you came to know Christ. The choice of the right words, the flow of your story, and knowing how to begin and how to end are all important.

The purpose of preparing a testimony is not to memorize it and give it verbatim, but to help you put into words some of the important and interesting details of your conversion.

A testimony serves primarily 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 hearing a personal testimony.

Testimonies can be prepared on many subjects and tailored to various audiences. The kind of testimony outlined here is designed to share with a non-Christian in a one-on-one or small group setting.

Before – How - After

1. Before Christ:

a. Many people's actions spring out of their unsatisfied deep inner needs. What were some of your unsatisfied deep inner needs before you came to know Jesus Christ? Some examples are:

- lack of peace
- fear of death
- something missing
- no meaning to life
- desire to be in control
- loneliness
- lack of security
- lack of purpose
- lack of significance
- no real friends
- no motivation

b. Non-Christians are usually trying to satisfy their deep inner needs through unsatisfactory solutions. In the past, what unsatisfactory solutions did you use to attempt to meet those deep inner needs? As you develop your testimony, list positive as well as negative solutions you may have tried. Some examples are:

- marriage/family
- work
- drugs/alcohol
- sports/fitness
- money
- education
- hobbies/entertainment
- sex
- wrong friends

2. How I changed:

a. Describe the circumstances that caused you to consider Christ as the solution to your deep inner needs. Identify the events that led to your conversion. In some cases this may have taken place over a period of time.

b. State specifically the steps you took to become a Christian. If there is a particular passage of Scripture that applies here, you may want to use it. Usually you will simply paraphrase it.

c. Include the gospel clearly and briefly. The gospel reveals our sin, the consequence of sin, the good news of Jesus' taking our sin upon himself on the cross, the power of the resurrection, and our need for obedience to Christ

3. After obeying the gospel:

a. State how Christ filled or is filling your deep inner needs. In the before, you expressed your needs and how you tried unsuccessfully to meet them. You now want to briefly show the difference that Christ has made in your life.

b. Conclude with a statement like: "But the greatest benefit is that I know for certain that I have eternal life." The person you talk to will tend to comment on the last thing you say. Often it is natural to move from the testimony into a clear presentation of the gospel.

Which Model Best Describes Your Story?

Adult Conversion - You trusted Christ as an adult. You have a distinct before, how and after.

Early Conversion, Adult Full Commitment - You made a decision for Christ as a child, but your life was characterized by spiritual immaturity—a lifestyle similar to that of a non-Christian—until you reached a point of crisis and recommitted your life to Christ. Evaluate whether your early conversion experience was genuine. If you conclude it was not genuine, then use Format 1 as your model.

Early Conversion, Consistent Growth - You probably grew up with Christian parents and have a strong church background. You may have very little before.

Write Out Your Story

The Worksheet at the end provides questions that will help you get started in writing out your story. As you write your first draft, refer again to the sample testimony that is most like your own story. Note how the person began the testimony and how he or she made the transitions between the main points. Here are some guidelines to remember as you write:

1. Make it sound conversational. Avoid literary sounding statements. Use informal language.
2. Share about what happened to you, don't preach about what should happen to them. Say "I" and "me," not "you." This helps keep the testimony warm and personal.
3. Avoid religious words, phrases, and jargon. (See chart on page 66.) Don't assume the listener knows what you mean by terms such as sin, accepted Christ, or even Christian.
4. Generalize so more people can identify with your story. Don't name specific churches, denominations, or groups. Avoid using dates and ages.
5. Include some humor and human interest. When a person smiles or laughs, it reduces tension. Humor is disarming and increases attention.
6. One or two word pictures increase interest. Don't just say, "Bill shared the gospel with me." You might briefly describe the setting so a person listening can visualize it.
7. Explain how Christ met or is meeting your deep inner needs, but do not communicate that all your struggles and problems ended at conversion.
8. Avoid dogmatic and mystical statements that skeptics can question, such as, "I prayed and God gave me a job," or "God said to me."
9. Simplify - combine information into generalities.

Practicing

After you have written out your testimony, you may want to have another Christian read it and make suggestions for improvement. Ask them to point out any areas that you need to explain further and to make sure the gospel is presented clearly. Practice giving your testimony to a friend or with your small group.

Tips on Leading into Your Testimony

When you feel comfortable giving your testimony, you may begin to wonder, "When do I share it with a non-Christian?" "How do I direct the conversation so it will lead to presenting my testimony?" You may find the following suggestions helpful.

1. Include some "small talk" before discussing spiritual matters. Discuss family, job, hobbies, interests, etc.
2. Be alert for expressed needs such as family problems or stress on the job. You can use these to show how Christ has helped you through some of the same areas.
3. Discuss past concerns and needs in your life. "We used to struggle in our marriage relationship," or, "I used to allow the pressures at work to get to me." "Then I discovered something that made a tremendous difference in my life."
4. Use contemporary situations in the news or in your area. "I saw on TV that drugs are epidemic in our country. It seems that people are trying to find something that satisfies. I can understand.."
5. Build relationships with them. It may take ten minutes or ten hours or ten days or ten months—but build relationships.
6. Don't condemn them for living like non-Christians, they are non-Christians. Your objective is to share how they can have a better life in Christ.
7. Avoid dogmatic "religious" statements. "Jesus is the answer to all your problems." He is, but they don't even know who He is, much less what He can do in their lives.
8. Avoid arguments on moral issues. You can expect non-Christians to have conflicts with clear biblical teaching. Remember they do not have a valid base from which to make correct moral decisions.

Tips on Closing Your Testimony

When you have shared your personal testimony, you may want to conclude with a statement that causes the person to reflect on what you have just shared. How you close will depend on how this person has been responding to what you have shared. If their response seems positive you could say something like:

1. "Bill, has anything like this ever happened to you?"
2. "Mary, do you know for certain whether you have eternal life?"

If their response seems negative or neutral you could say something like:

1. "If you are interested I would like to share more with you sometime."
2. "Well, that is what happened to me. If you ever want to talk about it any further, I would love to do so."

Resource: http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/334

WORKSHEET -- REFINE YOUR STORY

Suppose you have been given an opportunity, or a “lead in,” to talk about your faith. Now practice writing it below and think about an engaging way to close your story.

Before Christ:

I was/felt:

I searched/tried these things first:

How I changed:

What attracted me to Jesus:

What I did to obey the gospel of Jesus:

After Obeying the Gospel:

What the gospel satisfied in me:

At this point, it is often the case that a person will show interest in sharing their story of faith, or a desire for it. Ask them how they feel about faith in God.

Then, be ready to offer to lead them through Scripture to show them what God has planned for them! This is the goal – making a disciple of them!

***In the space below write your testimony in conversational language, using words that non-believers or unchurched may better understand. Use one of the three formats from *Sharing Your Testimony* as a guide.**

Prayerfully consider who might benefit from hearing your testimony. Make a concerted effort to love and care deeply about them, that the door to listen may be opened.

