

Introduction

Theology of Testimony: Our testimony as the church is specifically God's testimony about His son Jesus (the gospel), which we're called to proclaim in the Spirit's power: Christ in us & our bearing witness to Him (Col 1:27; 2Co 5:20; 1Jn 5:9f). Part of our gospel witness includes sharing our individual testimonies of how Jesus saves & is transforming our lives (Jn 4; Ac 26). This "personal aspect" of our testimonies is the focus for this handout.

Testimonies include: who Jesus is; what He has saved us from (sin, Satan, the world, hell) & saved us into (His kingdom); what He's doing by the Spirit's power; what God has promised for us (now/eternity) for His glory.

- Testimonies should be Personal: life experiences, emotions, etc., & what God has done in, for & thru us.
- Testimonies should be Trinitarian: God-glorifying (not self-glorifying), Christ-centered (more about Him than me), & Spirit-empowered (Spirit-led, joyful, confident, & trusting God to work in those who are listening).
- Testimonies should be *Ecclesiological (*about/related to the church): Include the impact of other believers in our coming to Christ and living the Christian life, and how we've seen God work in other people's lives.
 - o We should also emphasize that God has saved us as individual sinners and that we have been adopted into the family of God; we are now living our Christian lives in the fellowship of the church as the body of Christ. We celebrate the personal & collective identity we have as a new creation in Christ; for God has chosen to call out a people for His Name, to live in fellowship with Him for His eternal glory!

Using this Handout: May we enjoy sharing our testimonies as God gives us the love, courage, words, anointing and opportunities to do so. Some practical & theological principles are listed below to that end.

- We will not say everything listed in this handout when we share our testimonies, and there are other things not listed below which are also good to share. These principles are made available as one resource to use.
- We should pick and choose what is emphasized based on who we are talking to, time allotted, the context of the situation, what works best with our personal testimonies, the advice of others, & the Spirit's leading.
- Sometimes sharing our testimonies is done a little bit at a time, through multiple conversations with the same person(s) or group. What we share, what we emphasize, and how we say it will depend on the context, the relationships & ongoing opportunities we have, and the Spirit's leading.
- Knowing the principles below (& other ones) will help us be ready when God opens the door for us to share about our lives and the gospel, knowing how to recognize those opportunities, and being faithful to testify.

Principles for Sharing Our Testimonies

1. Emphasize the Difference Knowing Jesus makes: & the overall change in our lives (1Ti 1:12ff; Ac 4:13)

Share personal life experiences: meaningful to you, relevant to your testimony, and that others can relate to.

- Share how you became a Christian: Include some circumstances involved, what was going on in your heart & mind, the role of your family, being taught the Scriptures, and God's gracious work in you (see #4 below).
- Share about trials in your life: in general & in following Christ (Jm 1:2ff; 2Ti 3:12). Emphasize God's grace amidst the suffering of righteous living. Our gospel witness includes suffering well (1Pe 3:13ff) & is hindered when we complain to loudly, or by ignoring or underemphasizing the suffering unbelievers have faced.
- Consider your audience (spiritual background, life experience, age appropriateness, etc.), and the context (church, personal conversation, etc.). Limit religious lingo or theological words (or define what they mean).
- Share Scripture/Trust in the Gospel: Know the context/relate the verse(s) to life; name the author if known (adds a historical/personal touch); Trust the gospel's power as you prepare & speak (Ro 1:16; 1Th 2:5).
- Emphasize: God's love for all people; Jesus' love in us for others; We are created in God's image (relational, rational, reflect His glory) & we're all sinners (give examples: loving anything more than God, pride, unbelief, rebellion, immorality, sexism, racism, jealousy, bitterness); see Ro 5:8; Jn 3:16; 15:12ff; Ge 1:26f; Ro 1:18ff

How is my life different because God saved me/because I am following Jesus? Share some of the following...

- The purpose & joy you have in life; Experiencing forgiveness & power to forgive; Shame/guilt taken away; Courage, power/hope to face the challenges of life; God's sustaining grace/healing of your wounded heart.
- Faith/confidence knowing our God is good/sovereign over us, protecting/guiding us in the uncertainties of life and in this fallen, evil & dangerous world; and God's miraculous provisions or healings in your life.
- As a new creation in Christ; Adopted into God's family (belong/accepted); the Change in your heart toward goals in life, money, marriage, sex, the poor, entertainment, work; Your passion to live for Jesus & tell people about Him; God's love that you now have for people who are different than you & for our enemies; the Impact of the local church & fellow believers in your life; and the Hope you have for life after death.

2. Let Our Speech be Seasoned with Salt: and Pray for open doors & to be faithful (Col 4:2ff; Eph 6:18ff)

Be Engaging: humble, authentic, loving, passionate, joyful, real; Pray for God to open hearts/bless our witness.

Be Careful with Criticism: are we criticizing people (how & why)? Do not sugar coat evil/suffering, but also do not demonize people or overly emphasize the wrong of other individuals, groups, and so forth. It's also helpful to acknowledge something good, if possible, about those who have also failed us (family, church, friends, etc.).

Don't be too Preachy: If asked to speak/give a message, and we are using our testimonies to do so, then there might be more "preaching" involved in what we say. But often we share our testimonies like telling a true story, in a way that is inviting the listeners to hear what God has done in our lives. If addressing a divisive issue (in culture, politics, religion, etc.), be gracious, objective & holistic/not one sided; offering more light than heat.

3. Point People to Jesus Christ: as we share our lives & the gospel (Jn 1:35-51; 4:1ff; 20:30f; Ac 9; 26)

Our testimony should be personal but ultimately about Christ: God's work in us & the gospel (see Jn 4:28-42).

As John the Baptist says: "He must become greater; I must become less" (Jn 3:30; NIV).

- The most radical part of our testimony is not what we've been saved from or what we do by faith (as important as that is), but rather the awesomeness of the One who saved us. Our sin/hell itself is not greater than Jesus/God's grace. If it was, He wouldn't be able to save us from it ("grace greater than all our sin").
- Emphasize our ongoing Transformation: For many of us, the change that takes place later in life or what we have done by faith as Christians will be more captivating than how we were saved/our initial transformation.

Say a word about Jesus: who He is & what He did (before talking about the cross). He loved sinners, lived counter-culturally, did miracles; He's God the Son, Israel's long awaited Messiah foretold by the prophets, who had divine power but allowed Himself to be crucified; He rose from the dead, He is King & He's coming back.

- We should do so for multiple reasons: 1) that's how Mt, Mk, Lk & Jn share the gospel (talking about His life & who He is); 2) this gives people more biblical content upon which to believe that Christ is the one who can save them; & 3) this helps our testimonies be "Christ-centered" and not too "me-centered" and so forth.

Emphasize the Cross/God's Grace: we're sinners/separated from God, deserve judgment, & cannot save ourselves; and that eternal life is for all who will repent/believe (Jn 3:16; Ac 17:30; Ro 1:16f; 10:9f; Rev 22:17).

4. Emphasize God's Sovereignty & Kingdom: unto His eternal glory (Ro 8:28ff; 16:25ff)

Chronologically & theologically speaking, our testimonies start with God. This does not mean you should begin your testimony talking about God. Many times a different approach will be more effective (see #5 below). But some of the truths about God's sovereign-saving grace & plan should be included in what we share.

- Our testimony is about kingdom: Jesus is King; God is saving us into His kingdom (His presence-reign) & continues to work in us for His glory (Jn 3:3ff; Mt 25:34; Mk 4; Ac 28:23ff; 1Pe 2:9ff; Dan 7:13ff; Rev 11:15).

God chose us in Christ: & set His loving affection on us before He created the world (Eph 1; Ro 8:29; 1Th 2:4).

He created us to be His people for His glory & He loves/cares for us (Gen 1-2; Rev 21-22; Mt 6:25ff; Php 4:4ff).

- He knew us, had His plans for us & our daily lives before we were born (Ps 139:16; Ro 8:28ff; cf. Jer 1:5).
- Because of our sin nature/sinful choices, we were without hope & without God in this world; we've rejected God & deserve judgment; we don't understand the gospel & reject the gospel even as God reveals it to us; & we only begin seeking God as He moves upon us (Eph 2:1ff; Ro 1:18ff; 9:30ff; 2Co 4:4f; Mk 4:1ff).
- God in His grace not only provides a way for us to be saved, He also reveals Himself to lost sinners who are not looking for Him, and draws us into His kingdom even when we initially resist the Spirit's voice & call. Christianity is God coming to us to save us for His glory, not primarily us reaching out & finding Him.
- Our testimony is less about "us finding God" & more about "God revealing Himself to us" (Ro 10:20).

Emphasize how God reached out to you: calling you home & softening your heart. Jesus says: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (Jn 6:44a) & "no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt 11:27b).

5. Some Practical Steps: always be ready to give an answer for the hope we have (1Pe 3:13-17)

Pray & take time to write out your testimony. Put an outline together and then fill in the details. Keep it updated.

- If you are reading your testimony, look up & around, and give eye contact once in awhile. If you are comfortable with public speaking & well versed, use an outline (rather than reading word for word).
- Have different versions of your testimony put together if possible, that emphasize different parts of your life, things God has done/is doing, and so forth, geared for different audiences and purposes.

Outline (example): 1) Pre-Christian life (or a topic about your personal life); 2) How/why you became a Christian (or how Jesus relates to your topic); 3) The difference knowing & following Christ makes; 4) Gently encourage others to consider Christ, or put their faith in Him if they are ready. 5) Thank people for listening & thank God.

Be ready & able to share your testimony in 3 to 5 minutes; and longer when appropriate. Listen to & learn from other testimonies. Enjoy sharing it. May God bless us all as we testify to His gospel & saving grace in our lives!