

Tips for Preparing Your Personal Testimony

Testimonies can be prepared and tailored for various audiences. The testimony we will each prepare could be used to:

- present to the church family; *or*
- share in small group; *or*
- give to a non-Christian.

1. *The General Outline of a Personal Testimony*

- a. *Before* – a short sketch of what your life was like before you became a follower of Jesus.
- b. *How* – exactly what the circumstances were leading you to believing the gospel: what happened?
- c. *After* – relating the changes in your life since you became a follower of Jesus.

2. *Guidelines for Preparing the More Specific Content*

- a. Make it concise. Keep it to one full page or less.
- b. Make it conversational. Write as you would speak, using your normal vocabulary.
- c. Make it personal. People will appreciate some transparency. Use “I” and “me” not “you.”
- d. Make it specific. A few important details will leave an impression.
 - 1. *Poor detail*: "My dad helped me understand about Jesus."
 - 2. *Good detail*: "I had great talks with my parents. One day my dad and I discussed at some length who Jesus Christ really is."
- e. Make it realistic. Following Jesus can be both easy and difficult.
- f. Make it God-focused. Point people to the character of God and what He is like.
- g. Make it Scriptural. Share at least one Scripture verse that was key in your salvation.
- h. Make it understandable. Avoid religious words and phrases for the sake of non-Christians.

Religious Words Possible Substitutes

Born again.....Decided to become a follower of Jesus
Transgression.....Disobedience, Broke God’s standards, Rebellion
Went forward.....Talked to someone about my need for forgiveness
Under the blood.....God forgave me for my disobedience
Accepted Christ.....Became a follower of Jesus
Saved.....Converted, I began to follow Jesus, I was forgiven
Sinner’s prayer.....Prayed, Asked God to be forgiven
Believer.....Follower of Jesus
Repent.....Turned away from my old way of life to a new way of life

In the *Before* section:

- a. Include positive aspects of your life. (What was important to me? What were my goals?)
- b. Include negative aspects of your life. (I was selfish, caused a lot of hurt, irreverent)
- c. Simplify sentences and shorten them when possible. Mention only a limited number of people you know and such things as moves, meetings, and jobs. Use only first names when possible.
 1. *Cluttered sentence*: "Bill Smith, Thomas Van Buren and his cousin Ed Matthews came by my office at Acme Plumbing and Appliance Company."
 2. *Simple sentence*: "Bill and some men talked with me at work one day."
- d. Combine information for brevity. "After living in five states and attending six different schools, I found myself at my first engineering job."

In the *How* section:

- a. What was happening in your life at that point? What was the significant event or events that confronted your need to become a follower of Jesus?
- b. Communicate the gospel clearly and briefly. You need to include:
 1. Reality of God and what He is like
 2. The fact and penalty of sin, your condition
 3. Christ's life and payment for that penalty
 4. The requirement of repentance and faith
- c. Make the Bible the authority.
 1. *Poor*: "He shared with me that I had disobeyed God and needed forgiveness."
 2. *Good*: "He shared with me that the Bible said ...".
 3. Choose one, at most two verses, which sum up the truth which confronted you with Jesus Christ. Memorize these to include in your testimony.
- d. Tell how you obeyed the call of God.
 1. Did you pray? Tell what you prayed. "I prayed to God and told him that I had disobeyed. I acknowledged His ways are true. I asked Him to forgive me, because of what Jesus had done..."
 2. Don't make prayer, raising your hand, walking an aisle or another act the means of becoming a Christian. The key is acknowledging the truth of God's Word and obedience to the command of God to follow Jesus Christ.

In the *After* section:

- a. Conclude with two or three positive blessings of becoming a Christian.
- b. Challenge or invite your listeners by asking them a question. The last sentence of your testimony could be: "Are you willing to truly know who God is?"

EXAMPLE TESTIMONIES

EXAMPLE #1:

I. What my life was like before I decided to follow Jesus Christ.

Not too many years ago, life was very dull and uninteresting to me. I was pretty unhappy. I was in a rut, I felt very lonely, and I found new friendships very superficial and not based on anything meaningful.

I really became concerned about my future. I saw people around me hurting badly. I looked at many of the problems in the world, and I started asking myself: "What is life all about?" After a close friend died, I wondered what was after death." If there wasn't anything, life itself seemed almost pointless.

II. How I decided to follow Jesus Christ.

I knew very little about God, but I wanted to know. I knew there was a co-worker named Jessica who I learned was a Christian. One day, I asked her a few questions and she shared with me that God says in the Bible, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

He kept his promise. After several weeks of talking with Jessica and asking her questions, I came to understand the big picture. I realized that God created me to know Him and enjoy everything about Him. I realized that what was stopping me from having this joy was my own failure to acknowledge God and believe what the Bible said about my own brokenness. She explained to me that Jesus came to serve me by living a life of perfect obedience in every way possible, even when it meant his own death on the cross. But, to show that God was just, He raised Jesus from the dead.

I admit, it took me some time to come to grips with that. Eventually, it made perfect sense though. I knew I failed to measure up, even on my best days. I just figured that's what it meant to be human. I remember when Jessica explained that because God created me, He had every right to expect whatever He wanted from me. I was convinced that there were others who were better people than I who could meet those expectations. However, what I had not previously considered was that they too must fall short of something, even on their best days. What about them?

That's when Jessica explained that I was comparing myself with the wrong standard. I was comparing my life to people I knew or knew of that I thought were really great people. Once I compared those people to Jesus, it seemed we were all in the same boat, just in different parts of it. Once I had the right standard, it was really simple to see.

However, it almost seemed too good to be true. God's standard is perfect obedience. God set that standard so that I could see no one can meet the standard except Jesus. Jesus had to be God in order to perfectly obey, yet He had to be man so we had someone human to identify with. There is a Scripture that says: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

What was too good to be true was that all I had to do was believe that Jesus did all of this for me. I made that Scripture personal. I put my name where the pronouns were: "For Susan's sake he made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him Susan might become the righteousness of God." Jessica explained that the phrase "in him" meant if I believed these things about God, Jesus, and myself, I was "in him." It would sort of be like Jesus saying to God, "Susan's with me." I'm accepted, only because Jesus was righteous. Jesus took away my unrighteousness when He died on the cross and gave me his own righteousness.

III. What following Jesus Christ has meant to me.

When I put my faith in Jesus Christ, my life began to change in various ways. He filled my life with true joy. Life really has meaning now and that meaning affects everything.

I know that God has forgiven me for all of the wrong things I've done and I am no longer condemned. However, there are times where I still struggle with acceptance. I often need reminding that God accepts me no matter what, because I am "in him." That really gives me comfort and brings about more love and gratitude.

If that wasn't enough, being "in Jesus" is like having a new family. A really big family. I now have relationships that are not built upon some superficial basis. Instead, we share the same struggles and joys of life, but Jesus is the basis for our relationship. It is an incredible reality.

Example #2:

When I was a teenager I was pretty rebellious. I wasn't really bad, into drugs or anything, but I did just about anything else to go against authority, whether my parents, teachers or anyone else.

One day some friends invited me to go and see a Billy Graham movie at the local theatre. It was called "Time to Run" and was about a teenage boy who was also a rebel. As I watched the movie I thought that it was about me. Everything in the movie was exactly the same as my life. It was crazy! The movie showed how he rebelled against all authority until he finally saw where it was leading him. One of his friends told him about Jesus and how knowing Him changes everything, even for rebels.

After the movie I talked to some of the people there about what it meant to trust in Jesus Christ. They showed me that my rebellion was really against God. I was disobeying Him and that was sin. They showed me that all sin needs to be punished. It's like the saying, "You do the crime, you pay the time." The problem was that if I continued to rebel against God, I would have to pay an eternity in hell for my consequences.

Then they read a verse from the Bible which says, "But God demonstrates His own love for us because even when we were still sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) I realized that I had been disobeying God, rebelling against Him and I needed His forgiveness and His acceptance.

They explained from the Bible that Jesus died for me even though I was rebelling against God. That was pretty amazing! They went on to explain that God's ways actually bring about personal joy and flourishing. I thought that believing in Jesus meant your life was about following a bunch of rules from some other ancient culture. Later, I came to see just how wrong I was!

Several days after the movie, I noticed that I started feeling bad when I would rebel in even the smallest way, like when I was disrespectful to my dad. I was not used to feeling that way. I kept hearing in my mind: "I'm really disrespecting God and yet He loves me." I couldn't get it out of my mind. It seemed like all day, every day, that's all I was hearing.

The next time I got together with the same friends who invited me to the movie, I told them what was going on and asked them why I was feeling that way. They explained from the Bible that God was convicting me about the truth of my rebellion and the truth of His love. I asked: "What do I do now?"

They asked me what I thought I should do to show my dad I was wrong for disrespecting him. I responded: "Say I'm sorry, tell him I was wrong, ask for forgiveness." "Yeah, but that's only part of it" they said. If I believed God's ways really bring about joy and flourishing, then to disrespect my dad was rebellion against God, and I was only making my life miserable by disrespecting my dad. I needed to stop disrespecting him. I told them they were crazy and that they didn't know my dad.

Then, I heard those words in my mind again: "I'm really disrespecting God and yet He loves me." I was convicted. What I needed most was to tell God I was sorry and that I was wrong, and I needed His forgiveness. My friends explained that I can actually talk to God and tell Him those things. They said it is called prayer when you talk to God.

So, right there, on my friend's couch, I prayed and told God I was sorry, I was wrong, and I needed His forgiveness, not just for my disrespect, but for all my rebellion against Him. I told Him that I wanted to follow His ways and that I didn't want to be a rebel anymore. I want to follow Jesus.

I felt this new freedom I never had before. My friends encouraged me to come with them to a Bible study. Funny thing was, when I went, I learned a lot more about my rebellion, (I had a lot more apologies to give 😊), but I also learned that there was even more of God's love, forgiveness, and acceptance in spite of my rebellion. I still have struggles and challenges, but in spite of those, I really do have joy and can flourish in the midst of those struggles and challenges. I have a new perspective now. Following Jesus is much better than rebelling against Him. Will you follow him too?