



Chapter 8

How-to Share Your Testimony

Acts 26:1-32

UNDERSTANDING

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DISCUSSION

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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 26:1-32

The Big Picture

Knowing how to tell our story helps us tell others about God's story.

Catholic speaker Matthew Kelly once said, "What is the most powerful force in human in history? Story. Want to start a war? Tell a story. Want to end a war? Tell a story. Want to cause people to fall in love? Tell a story. Want to cause people to fall out of love? Tell a story. Want to inspire people? Tell a story. Want to degrade people? Tell a story. Want to motivate people? Tell a story. Want to discourage people? Tell a story. The most powerful force in history is story."

Stories are powerful. Catholic philosophy Alasdair MacIntyre said, "Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal.... I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'... There is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources."

When we tell our story, we allow others to help come in contact with their own story while at the same time opening up a larger story of Jesus Christ that they can enter into and live out.

Today we will look at St. Paul's testimony in Acts and have your group begin the process of writing down and practicing their own 3-5 minute testimony.

Application to Jesus

Jesus is the center of our story. How did we come to know and love a person who changed everything?

St. Paul's Testimony

St. Paul had an incredible story. He was a Jewish Pharisee who persecuted Christianity until Jesus appeared to him and asked him to stop persecuting Christ's body, the Church. St. Paul went from killing Christians to becoming a Christian, even to the point of dying for his faith. In Acts 26, St. Paul finds himself before the Jewish puppet king Agrippa. St. Paul witnesses to King Agrippa by telling his story in four parts:

1. Life before he knew Jesus Christ (Acts 26:1-11)
2. How he came to know Jesus Christ (Acts 26:12-18)
3. His life in Jesus Christ (Acts 26:19-23)
4. His challenge and invitation to the audience (Acts 26:27-29)

Understanding / How-to Share Your Testimony

St. Paul's Life Before He Knew Jesus Christ (Acts 26:1-11)

Because of Agrippa's Jewish background, St. Paul is sure to make the connection to Judaism, such as in his belief in the resurrection and his understanding of Christianity as a response to the prophets. St. Paul is aware of his audience and tailors his message accordingly.

How St. Paul Came to Know Jesus Christ (Acts 26:12-18)

Paul has an incredible story of his first encounter with Jesus. While our stories might not be this dramatic, hopefully everyone in your group has experienced a time when they encountered Jesus Christ in a deep way. For those who haven't, this is a great opportunity as a Bible study leader to help them fully understand how Jesus can change their entire life.

His Life in Jesus Christ (Acts 26:19-23)

St. Paul backs up his story by recounting how he suffered and was willing to die for his faith. It can cause some pause in our lives to reflect on what we are willing to do for Jesus.

The Challenge and Invitation to the Audience (Acts 26:27-29)

St. Paul is standing before a governor and a king who have the power to kill him. And, at the same time, he refuses to miss the opportunity to tell them about Jesus.

The main goal of this chapter is to help the participants in your Bible study develop a 3-5 minute testimony. Print out a copy of the FOCUS Testimony Worksheet for every member of your group and follow the instructions. The participants should begin the process of developing their testimonies during the study. They should complete this process and have a testimony to share with the group during the following study. After they share with the group, they will be asked to share this testimony with two people.

Application to Our Lives

Forming a 3-5 minute testimony helps us witness to the power of God's presence in our lives.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 26:1–32

STEP 1: OPENER

What's the best story you have heard lately? Follow-up: Why are stories so powerful?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

After his third missionary journey, St. Paul heads to Jerusalem. Even though he knows that he will most likely be imprisoned, he goes anyway. While in the temple in Jerusalem, St. Paul is falsely accused of trying to destroy the temple. Before the enraged mob can kill him, the Roman authorities arrest him. After more than two years in prison, St. Paul is brought before Agrippa, a Jewish king under Roman authority. During this hearing, St. Paul gives his testimony.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Acts 26:1-32

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. Why do you think a testimony is important?

Answer: It gives a clear account of why someone chose to be a Christian. It shows that we are not just born into this faith but that we make a conscious decision to live it out.

Act 1: St. Paul's life before he knew Jesus Christ (Acts 26:1-11)

2. Why is someone's past an important part of their story?

Answer: Someone's history can build bridges and make connections with the audience. It gives the audience something to relate to.

3. How does St. Paul's past relate to his audience?

Answer: He knows that he is speaking to a Jewish audience, so he uses the Old Testament as part of his argument.

4. How do you think your testimony should change based on who your audience is?

Answer: While we shouldn't change our story, when possible, we should emphasize aspects that our audience might best relate to.

Act 2: How St. Paul came to know Jesus Christ (Acts 26:12-18)

5. Do you remember having a conversion experience? What was it like?

Allow the group to discuss.

6. Why is it important for us to remember this experience and tell it to others?

Allow the group to discuss.

Act 3: St. Paul's life in Jesus Christ (Acts 26:19-23)

7. How does St. Paul's life after his conversion help support his argument?

Answer: His life is a testament to the strength of his conviction. He is willing to suffer and die for Jesus.

8. How do our own lives prove the strength of our convictions?

Allow the group to discuss.

Act 4: The challenge and invitation to the audience (Acts 26:27-29)

9. How does St. Paul invite King Agrippa?

Answer: He appeals to Agrippa's belief in the prophets and his own wisdom.

10. Have you ever shared a testimony about Jesus or God's work in your life with others?

Allow the group to discuss.

11. What do you say in your testimony?

Allow the group to discuss.

Note to the Leader: Pass out copies of the FOCUS Testimony Worksheet for your participants to use.

12. The main goal of this chapter is to have you develop a 3-5 minute testimony. We will use the FOCUS Testimony Worksheet and explanation to write down our testimonies. Next study we will share our testimonies with each other and then share them with two people outside of our study.

Vision: Why Testimonies?

To start, share with one another about your best friend and the impact that person has had on your life.

Ultimately, this is exactly what you are doing in a testimony. Psalm 71:15 says, "My mouth will tell of your righteous acts; of your deeds of salvation all the day.... Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul." As Christians, it is imperative that we are able to tell others about Him. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you."

Discussion / How-to Share Your Testimony

Every Christian should have a memorized and a written testimony. The testimony is a powerful yet simple tool. Your task, if you choose to accept it, is to prepare a testimony that is three to five minutes long. Practice it with a disciple, other Christians, and eventually non-Christians. Later on, you can find ways to give a longer testimony of 10 to 20 minutes, suitable for larger audiences, and even a 30-second testimony to use in shorter conversations.

Your Story in Four Acts (Acts 26)

Let's look at St. Paul's testimony in Acts 26 as a way to prepare for your own testimony. In Acts 26, Paul has four parts, or "acts," in his testimony:

1. Life before Jesus Christ
2. Coming to know Jesus Christ
3. Life in Jesus Christ
4. An invitation

Read Acts 26:1–29.

Discussion Question: How does St. Paul's testimony fit into the four acts?

The answer is outlined below, along with some questions to consider as you think about each act.

Act 1: My life before I knew Jesus Christ (Acts 26:1–11)

- What kind of a person was I socially, spiritually, and emotionally?

- Introduce a unifying theme to the testimony (for example, a familiarity with Christ but no personal knowledge of Him, loneliness in college, spiritual hunger, or the Fatherhood of God). Paul's unifying theme is his devotion to Judaism.

Act 2: How I came to know Jesus Christ (Acts 26:12–18)

- What happened? Even if the conversion was gradual, the testimony should still have one concrete moment or turning point for the audience to grasp.
- If other people were involved in bringing about the conversion, take care to make sure this section is Christ-centered and not agent centered.
- Avoid any over-dramatization. God's work in our lives is not always easy to express. Consider how you can organize your story so that people will understand what you have been through and who God is.

Act 3: My life in Jesus Christ (Acts 26:19–23)

- What changes have occurred in my life? How am I living my relationship with Jesus?
- Be especially careful here about the language you choose. Avoid using loaded words and phrases that could separate you from people who are not familiar with them, such as "follow the Spirit," "indwelling of the Trinity," "vocation," "sacraments," and "dark night of the soul."
- Avoid extremes. Try hard not to come across as a perfected saint. At the same time, don't dwell on struggles and failures.

Act 4: The challenge and invitation to the audience (Acts 26:27-29)

- Ask the audience, implicitly or explicitly, “How will you respond to Jesus Christ?”

Elements of a Good Testimony (CAST)

When telling your story, keep these four important elements in mind:

CONCRETENESS: The audience is given “handles” to the testimony. Experiences, places, and persons are described accurately and unambiguously, yet without obsession over detail. The turning point (how one came to know Jesus Christ) is identifiable and specific, even if it is just one of many turning points. The person giving the testimony comes across as real and ordinary.

ACCESSIBILITY: The experiences are described in such a way that the audience can relate to or understand them. The language chosen is free from religious terms and dense terminology that could separate the speaker from the audience, like “sin,” “tabernacle,” and “Eucharistic adoration.”

SIMPLICITY: The “plot” or “thread” of the testimony is clear and easy to follow, without confusing tangents and elaborate details. Jesus Christ is at the center of this testimony. He is its hinge.

THEMATIC STRUCTURE: There is one overarching theme or analogy. Every point of the testimony should in some way be related to this single theme.

Practice

Fill out the Testimony Worksheet below to develop your story. After you write your testimony out, share it with others.

Summary

During this time, you should have:

- Read and prayed through St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.
- Reviewed the vision and the "why" behind testimonies.
- Reviewed the four parts of St. Paul's testimony from Acts 26.
- Reviewed the four elements of a good testimony.
- Written out your testimony.
- Practiced your testimony with one another.

Conclusion

Testimonies are crucial, not only for telling others about God, but also for reminding yourself of what the Lord has done in your own life. Memorizing your testimony and being able to share it with others will reaffirm your own experience and provide an easy way to introduce others to Christ.

TESTIMONY WORKSHEET

Goal: Create a three to five-minute testimony that you can share with others.

Instructions: Take some time to reflect on the different sections, or “acts,” of your life below. Begin by thinking about a theme and brainstorm thoughts for each section. Make an outline here of each section that you can eventually develop into a completed three to five-minute presentation.

Act 1: My life before I knew Jesus Christ

Act 2: How I came to know Jesus Christ

Act 3: My life in Jesus Christ

Act 4: The invitation

