5.2

THE POWER OF YOUR TESTIMONY



Optional *Lectio Divina* Prayer

1. Read 1 Corinthians 2:1–5.
2. Meditate on the words.
3. Speak to Christ about this passage.
4. Rest and listen in God's presence.
5. Discuss together.

Who is one of the most important people in your life: a best friend, a mentor, or a hero?

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Take a minute to discuss the influence that person has had on your life.

WHY TESTIMONIES?

Ultimately, what you just did is exactly what you are doing in a testimony. You are simply sharing with others about your truest, best friend, Jesus Christ, and the influence he has had on your life. The Psalmist reflects this experience when he says, "My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, of your deeds of salvation all the day" (Ps 71:55, ESV) and "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul" (Ps 66:16). True Christian disciples want to tell others about Christ. 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."

A prepared and practiced testimony is a powerful tool for sharing the Faith. People today tend to be more open to authentic, personal stories of faith than to mere teachings and ideas about the Faith. As Pope St. Paul VI once said, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."[1] A personal testimony about the difference Christ has made in your life often touches hearts more than talking about the ideas of the Faith in an abstract way.

Sometimes you might give your testimony in a small group you're leading. Sometimes you might share it with an individual in discipleship. Many times it's good to have your testimony prepared for an opportunity that may come up in conversation when you want to share your faith with someone: a friend when you're out for coffee, someone at work, a relative during a holiday gathering.

Sometimes we might be tempted to think that our story isn't exciting enough. But God has chosen to work in your life in a particular way

Notes



for a particular reason. Remember, you are testifying to his work, and that is something to be celebrated. Testimonies about many small ways of turning back to God can be just as powerful as more dramatic stories of conversion.

DISCUSS

What has been your experience with testimonies? Have you ever shared yours before? Why are testimonies a powerful tool for sharing Jesus with the world?

YOUR STORY IN FOUR ACTS

In Scripture, St. Paul uses his testimony to share Christ with others and even proclaim truth to the religious leaders of his day. His story is told at least three times in the book of Acts as a tool for evangelization. Let's look at the way Paul shares his testimony in Acts 26 to help us learn how to share our own testimony. There are four parts, or "acts," in Paul's testimony:

1. **Life before Jesus Christ**
2. **Coming to know Jesus Christ**
3. **Life in Jesus Christ**
4. **Inviting others to know Jesus Christ**

Act 1: My life before I knew Jesus Christ

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Read Acts 26:1–11.

When preparing our testimony, first we need to answer the question, "What kind of a person was I socially, spiritually, and emotionally before I encountered Jesus Christ?"

Within this section, avoid giving too much detail about sins in your past life. Be modest and discreet in what you share. The audience does not need to know details about drunkenness, sexual sin, etc. Simply saying something like, "I was doing things on the weekends I shouldn't have been doing," "I was struggling with purity" or something similar is usually enough to give people a sense of your real struggle without putting a picture in their minds of you in your sin.

DISCUSS

What kind of person were you socially, spiritually, or emotionally before you encountered Jesus Christ?

Act 2: How I came to know Jesus Christ

Read Acts 26:12–18.

What happened when you encountered Jesus? Even if the conversion was gradual, the testimony should still have concrete moments or a turning point for the audience to grasp.

If other people were involved in bringing about the conversion, strive to ensure that this section is Christ-centered and not focused on someone else. It is important to remember that Jesus is the main character in your testimony.

Avoid any over-dramatization. God's work in our lives is not always

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easy to express. Consider how you can organize your story so that people will understand what you have been through and who God is.

DISCUSS

What were some of the key moments in your relationship with Jesus? What did God do to reveal himself to you?

Act 3: My life in Jesus Christ

Read Acts 26:19–23.

What changes have occurred in my life because of my relationship with Jesus? How am I living differently? How has a relationship with Jesus allowed me to live a life that is freer, fuller, and more joyful? Emphasize this part of your testimony because the listener needs to know the significance of a relationship with Jesus. Be attentive to the language you choose here; not everyone listening to your testimony will be familiar with "churchy" language.

Avoid extremes. Try not to come across as a perfected saint. At the same time, don't dwell on the details of your struggles and failures.

DISCUSS

How has a relationship with Jesus allowed you to live a life that is freer, fuller and more joyful? What do you want others to know about having a relationship with Jesus?

Act 4: Inviting the audience to know Christ

Read Acts 26:27–29.

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Ask the audience: How will you respond to Jesus Christ, who amazingly offers this salvation to everyone? In a casual setting, you could ask, "Would you like to learn more?" You could even transition from your story to sharing the Gospel directly. Remember, the purpose of a testimony is to lead someone into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, allow your testimony to be an opportunity for someone to hear the message of the Gospel through your story.

DISCUSS

With what message do you want to leave your listener? What step do you want them to take?

ELEMENTS OF A GOOD TESTIMONY

As you create and practice the story of Jesus' work in your life, keep these three important elements in mind:

- **CONCRETENESS**: Give the audience details they can relate to. Describe experiences, places, and persons accurately and unambiguously, but don't obsess over details. Include an identifiable and specific turning point (how you came to know Jesus Christ), even if it is just one of many turning points. Your testimony should come across as real and approachable.

- **ACCESSIBILITY**: Describe experiences in such a way that the audience can relate and understand. Choose language free of religious jargon and dense terminology that could separate you from the audience, like "sin," "tabernacle" or "Eucharistic adoration." If you do need to use "churchy" words, take a moment to explain them. Also, ask yourself, "What parts of my story would be especially meaningful to this person?" You will likely emphasize different aspects of your testimony when you are talking to an atheist versus a lukewarm Christian.

Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witness.

— Pope St. Paul VI

Notes

Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you.

— 1 Peter 3:15



SIMPLICITY: Include a "plot" or "thread" that is clear and easy to follow, without confusing tangents or elaborate details. Place Jesus Christ at the center of your testimony. He is its hinge. And be sure to keep it short, usually 3–5 minutes or less. Testimonies that are longer than five minutes usually get into too many details and don't have that simple focus for people to follow. A long, meandering testimony loses people and may even turn them off.

DISCUSS

What are some things that might limit the effectiveness of your testimony? How can you eliminate those elements? What would make your testimony powerful?

TAKE ACTION

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Based on your discussion of the four "acts" of a testimony, spend some time thinking through and writing down your own testimony. Then, take some time to practice by sharing it with someone whose leadership you trust. Ask them to give you feedback. Practicing frequently will help you develop your story.

Having already prepared and practiced sharing your faith story will help you be ready to share it whenever the opportunity arises. There may be times when you plan to share your testimony, like at your small group or with someone you are leading. Often, though, situations will naturally arise in which you can share about your faith. If someone asks you a question about the Faith, shows curiosity about Christ, asks you why you live the way you do or simply seems like they need encouragement, hope, or inspiration, you want to be prepared to share what Jesus has done in your life.

KEY CONCEPTS

Giving Witness to the Faith: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (Pope St. Paul VI).

1 Peter 3:15: "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you."

The Four Parts of an Effective Testimony, Following St. Paul's Example in Acts 26: 1) Life before Jesus Christ; 2) Coming to know Jesus Christ; 3) Life in Jesus Christ; 4) Inviting others to know Jesus Christ

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[1] Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, accessed March 29, 2020, Vatican.va., 41.