

SHARING YOUR TESTIMONY

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I. What is a testimony?

1. *Definition:* A Sharing about Your relationship with God.
 - An explanation of how God has worked in your life, an account of a specific saving action of the Lord in your life.
2. The *Subjective* Gospel (Testimony) & *Objective* Gospel (Kerygma) → Evangelistic 1-2 punch!
3. *Purpose:* To open listeners to God and lead them to draw closer to Him.
4. *Content & Structure* (We will practice one for Personal conversion, 3 minute length)
 - **Various types:** Personal Conversion, Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Vocation, Healing, Growth in prayer.
 - **3-part structure:** Describe (1) Your life before Christ, (2) Your conversion to Christ, and (3) Your life in Christ.

II. Why should I share my testimony?

1. Jesus sent His disciples out into the world to witness to His resurrection. He is sending you.
 - “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be My witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth.” - Acts 1:8
2. You should be ready to share how Christ became the center of your life and your source of hope.
 - “Reverence Christ in your hearts. Should anyone ask you the reason for this hope of yours, be ever ready to reply, but speak gently and respectfully.” - 1 Peter 3:15-16
3. For first evangelists, the Apostles, the Kerygma & their personal testimony were intertwined.
 - They could say “I saw him die, I saw him risen!” St. Paul used testimony in Acts 22:1-21, 26:1-29, Phil 3:5-16.

III. The Power of a Testimony

1. **Non-Threatening** - “Unchurched” people more open to listen to your story than a teaching.
 - “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” - Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World*
2. **Personal** - Evidence that God is real and active in the personal lives of people today.
 - People will be able to relate to some aspect of your situation and your life experience. It is concrete and real.
3. **Arouses Interest** - Stirs up questions and an increased desire for God within the listener.
4. **Speaks for itself** - People can argue about a teaching, but hard to argue with experience.
5. **Powerful** - God works through a testimony and offers graces of conversion for those who hear.
 - “Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have salvation and power come, the reign of our God and the authority of His Anointed One. For the accuser of our brothers is cast out, who night and day accused them before our God. They defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.’” - Rev 12:10-11

(5 Points from *Catholic Evangelization Training Programs - Teacher’s Guide*, Franciscan University of Steubenville, 1990)

IV. When should I share it?

1. Share when someone would benefit from your story. Follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit.
2. Versatile - in conversation, in a small group, as part of a talk, to friends, family, strangers.
3. You may just be planting a seed for later conversion. God will give growth to that seed.
 - “For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, ... so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. It shall not return void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11)
4. Share your testimony with joy & confidence. Trust that God will use it to further His Kingdom.

TESTIMONY CHECKLIST

- Questions to help you get started:**
- How have you have experienced God in your life?
 - When you have asked God for help, how did He respond?
 - How has your life changed because of your faith in God?

1. Choose a theme that unites the testimony (Adapt your theme to the maturity level of the listeners)

Unforgiveness	→	Forgiveness	Searching for love	→	Experiencing God's love
Rebellion	→	Surrender	Stale prayer	→	Deep prayer life
Loneliness	→	Fellowship	Despair	→	Hope

A. Life Before

(1 min.)

- Give some *background* - your family size, age, etc.
- Share about the *good aspects* of your life.
- Describe the *problem area* or what was missing in your life (don't overemphasize)
- Give a *concrete example of a specific event*, not just generalities.
- Capture *interest of listeners* with humour, vivid language, and experiences that people can relate to.

B. Point of Conversion/Decision/God's intervention

(1 min.)

- The *most important part* of your testimony.
- Give a *clear and detailed description* of the conversion experience or decision point:
 - What circumstances caused you to turn to the Lord?
 - What was the central issue of your struggle? What did you surrender to the Lord?
 - What did you say? What did you think? What did you feel? What did you do?
 - What did the Lord do/say/change in your life at that point?
- Focus on *Jesus* and how your life changed because of God's action in your life, not just on events in your life.
- Sometimes one's initial conversion happens as a *process over time*:
 - Try to focus on one or more significant moments during that process and address the same questions above.

C. Life After

(1 min.)

- Give some concrete differences in your life, possibly by going back to the example from "before"
 - Ex:* "that day something new began for me... that was the first step for me... I began to... I stopped... I realized..."
- Don't give the impression that everything is perfect in your life now that you've met Jesus.
- Share briefly your present relationship with the Lord (if there is time)
- End with a summary and invitation, perhaps using a scripture that captures the theme:
 - "He can do the same for you..." "In Rev 3:20, Jesus says..."

Do...

- **Focus on Jesus** - Describe God's action in your life, not just on the events of your life.
- **Preserve a balance** between (a) *Before*, (b) *Conversion*, and (c) *After*
- **Be clear, accurate & concise.** Capture essence of what God has done in your life → more impact.
- **Remember your ABC's:** Audible, Brief, Christ-centered.

Don't... - Give a **mini-teaching** or preach in place of personal sharing (not a pulpit).

- Give a **travel-log** or include unnecessary events or details.
- **Glorify sin** or stir curiosity by giving too much detail. Make it age-appropriate for listeners.
- Use **Christian Lingo** (Hallelujah, born again, saved, backslid, Praise God, Amen, etc.)
- **Judge your former life too harshly** - someone listening might be there right now.
- **Condemn Others** or blame them for all your problems → Take personal responsibility.
- **Be Confrontational** - "You need to do X" (be invitational: "Jesus can do the same in your life")
- **Exaggerate for effect** - Tell it like it was/is. Capture subtlety of God's means of communicating to you.

TESTIMONY WORKSHEET

Life Before

Point of Conversion/Decision/God's intervention

Life After

TESTIMONY EXAMPLE

Part 1: Life before Christ

- I grew up in a normal Catholic family.
- I believed in God, but He wasn't a big part of my life.
- Ever since grade 7, I had planned on becoming a famous Rock 'n Roll star.
- I also began to copy that lifestyle by partying a lot.
- When I started high school, my Dad told me that I'd get as much freedom as I showed responsibility... Needless to say, I ended up being grounded for most of high school.
- When I was 18 I left home, moved in with some friends, and partied.
- A couple of years went by and I decided to get serious about becoming a R 'n R star.
- So I moved to Toronto...and partied.
- Eventually, I did start up a band and people liked our music.
- But there came a point where I felt that if I was really going to make it in the world of R 'n R, I would have to completely abandon God.
- I knew I had to make a decision.

Part 2: Conversion

- That Christmas I spent with my family.
- One night my Mom asked if I would pray the rosary with the family.
- Since they didn't own a TV and I didn't have any money to spend at the tavern, I figured why not.
- We were interrupted by a phone call.
- My Mom asked me if I believed in God; I said yeah.
- She then asked me if I believed in Jesus. I didn't answer her.
- Then she told me that Jesus is so gentle that He doesn't force Himself on us, but that He waits for us to invite Him into our hearts.
- I felt like there was a tug of war in my soul.
- In the silence of my heart I invited Jesus into my life.
- Immediately, the lights came on and I felt a deep peace.
- I broke down and wept; I realized that my life was in a mess and that I needed to go to confession.
- I was tired of running from God; I just wanted to do His will.

Part 3: Life in Christ

- From that point on my life changed completely. I went to confession.
- I stopped partying and moved in with my parents.
- I had a thirst to know God and to learn about my faith.
- I knew that God's plan for my life would make me the happiest.
- I began to pray daily, attending Mass and spending time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. I began to read the Bible.
- Today, I continue to do all these things. My relationship with God is the #1 priority in my life.
- Since I invited Jesus Christ into my heart, my life has been an adventure.
- God has an exciting plan for your life.
- In Rev 3:20 Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will enter his house and have supper with him and he with me."
- Right now, Jesus is standing at the door of your heart and knocking. Will you let Him in?

CRITIQUING A TESTIMONY

Steps to a Critique

1. Someone gives his/her testimony

- The leader should keep track of the time.
- The group who is listening makes notes in response to the “Questions to Consider” listed below.

2. Self-Critique - Person who gives the testimony says how they thought it went.

- Present both positive and negative comments about your own testimony. This can be short.
- Don't try to justify your mistakes.

3. Others' Critique - Leader of group opens the floor for others to comment.

- The giver of the testimony should write down points made during the critique, to improve the testimony later.
- Others present positive and negative comments about the testimony.
- Give your own opinion, independent of the other opinions given.
- Don't debate or refer to the other *critiques*, just comment on the testimony.
- Comment in order to build up your brothers and sisters.
- Be sincere but delicate, keep in mind who is sharing.
- Don't criticize or judge the person, but rather the message and format of the testimony.
- Leader needs to make sure that the critique is done according to the above rules, in a charitable manner.

4. Leader Concludes - gives summary with concluding comments.

Questions to Consider

1. The Objective

- Did the testimony have an objective?
- Was the objective accomplished?
- Did the testimony move me?
 - Did it have an effect of change/conversion within me?
 - Did it move me to change my heart and life?
 - Did it open me more to God and bring me in contact with Him?

2. The Content

- Was there a theme?
- Was the theme centered or was it scattered?
- Were there concrete and specific examples from life?

3. The Format

- Did the person connect with the people?
- Did the person dialogue with the people?
 - Did they refer to the people with gestures and words?
 - Were the examples and content relevant and engaging to the audience?
- How was the eye contact, jargon, tone, dialoguing?