

PRACTICAL EVANGELISM “The Power of Testimony”

Rev 12:11

They overcame him [the accuser of the brethren] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. NIV

Giving our testimony is an overcoming experience. Satan, the accuser of the brothers, is overcome by the blood of the Lamb and an uncompromising “word of testimony” (they did not love their lives more than the Lord – Rev. 6:9; 20:4). When we apply the blood of Jesus to an area of our life (1 John 1:7-10) and then give testimony to what the Lord has done for us, his hold on us is broken. Our testimony first increases our faith in the Lord (by recounting what He has done for you in your life) and then declares His goodness to others.

1 John 1:1-3

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. NIV

The power of personal testimony is that it is personal. It deals not so much with what we have been taught or what we think, but with what we have seen, heard, and touched with our own hands. Though our experiences are subjective, in many respects they are more concrete than a theology or a dogma. People can argue with your religion, but they'll tend to listen to stories of your experiences.

Luke 8:26-35

26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.

27 When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.

28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!"

29 For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

30 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him.

31 And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission.

33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside,
35 and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. NIV

I believe that it is essential to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit to be effective witness for the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). As a matter of fact, we are going to devote a whole teaching on working with the Holy Spirit in evangelism. But what is going on here? A mighty miracle has been done. A man who had terrorized the community and had been a threat to travelers, who wandered naked in the graveyard, is sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind (where did they get the clothes?). The people see all of this and are afraid.

Luke 8:36-37

36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.
37 Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. NIV

They ask him to leave! Can you believe it? I thought that if we got to emptying out hospitals and made the wheelchair companies go bankrupt, that everyone would come to Jesus. It doesn't hurt to do a miracle or two, but people come to Jesus by the foolishness of preaching.

Luke 8:38-39

38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying,
39 "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him. NIV

The man wanted to go with Jesus, but the Lord sent him to his home to tell how much God had done for him. Luke records for us that the man did indeed tell, not only in his home but in his hometown, how much Jesus had done for him [is this an indication that the man recognized Jesus' divinity—God has done, Jesus had done?]. But he didn't stop there.

Mark 5:18-20

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.
19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."
20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed. NIV

The Decapolis is a region occupied by a league of "ten cities", one of which was Damascus. The region was south of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan river (with the exception of Scythopolis, its capital which was west of the Jordan). His testimony opened up this Gentile dominated region to the Lord Jesus.

Mark 7:31-37

- 31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis.
- 32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.
- 33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue.
- 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!").
- 35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.
- 36 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it.
- 37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak." NIV

Many illustrations of this principle in Scripture could be given, but I want to concentrate on one in particular, the testimony of the Apostle Paul. Paul's personal testimony is recorded numerous times in various ways throughout the New Testament:

Before the Jews in Jerusalem	-	Acts 21:40-22:22
To the Philippian church	-	Phil 3:4-15
To the Galatian church	-	Gal 1:11-17
To the Corinthian church	-	1 Cor 15:8-10
To Timothy	-	1 Tim 1:12-17
Before King Agrippa	-	Acts 26:1-29

It is his testimony before King Agrippa that we are going to examine closely for a pattern of presenting our own testimonies. What I am going to present is adapted from Becoming a Contagious Christian, Session 4 – "What's Your Story?"¹. We are going to break down Paul's testimony into three parts: BC—Before Christ, Conversion, AD—Anno Domini, life in Christ.

BC – Before Christ:

Acts 26:4-11

- 4 "The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem.
- 5 They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee.
- 6 And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today.
- 7 This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me.
- 8 Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?
- 9 "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

¹ *Becoming a Contagious Christian, Leader's Guide*, Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel, & Bill Hybels, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Willow Creek Resources, 1995, p.135-141

- 10 And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.
- 11 Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them. NIV

Paul tells of his upbringing and his religious beliefs before encountering Jesus. He was so sure in his belief that he thought he was serving God by killing Christians!

Conversion:

Acts 26:12-18

- 12 "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.
- 13 About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions.
- 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'
- 15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.
- 16'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.
- 17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them
- 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' NIV

By any standard, Paul's conversion was dramatic. How many people, after all, have been knocked to the ground by a bright light and then witnessed to by the Lord Jesus himself? But notice verse 15 and 18. In verse 15, Jesus is proclaimed as alive and well and Lord. Forgiveness of sins and sanctification by faith in Jesus are spoken of in verse 18. Anyone can repeat that experience. Anyone can have faith that Jesus arose from the dead and offers forgiveness of sins. His conversion, dramatic as it was, was repeatable by anyone.

AD—The Year of Our Lord, life in Christ:

Acts 26:19-23

- 19 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.
- 20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.
- 21 That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.
- 22 But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen-
- 23 that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles." NIV

Paul's life after his conversion could not be in greater contrast to his life before. What he had previously persecuted, he now proclaimed. And in his proclamation, he made available to his listeners the truth of Jesus as the Messiah, raised from the dead and ready to forgive.

To every testimony, there is a reaction. We are not responsible for the reaction. We are responsible for the report. That being said, we can do our best to make our testimony as impacting as possible. This requires thinking it through and even practicing it. Let's look at Agrippa's response.

Acts 26:24

At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane." NIV

Have you ever had this reaction to a story of deliverance? "You're nuts!" the world might say. Let them say! What does Paul do? Does he say, "Sorry, King, your right. Must have been that bright Damascus Sun (Son!). I suppose I imagined the whole thing. Please forgive me for taking up your valuable time. Didn't mean to offend. Can I go now?" No, he pressed the point. He asked for a decision.

Acts 26:25-29

25 "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable.

26 The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

29 Paul replied, "Short time or long-I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." NIV

Paul brings his testimony to bear by asking a question that requires a response (not a rhetorical question). Do you believe the prophets? If the answer is yes, then you must believe that Jesus is the Messiah, for he did that which the prophets wrote.

If we were to think through our lives, we could compose a testimony using the same pattern. Ask yourself, what was my life or situation before Christ? How did I receive Christ? What has changed in my life or situation since I let Christ in? Answering these questions will help us build an outline of our testimony.

As stated earlier, testimonies can be multifaceted. For every deliverance we have received (from salvation on) there is a testimony waiting to be told. Many are hurt and broken where we have been healed and fixed. Our testimonies can springboard from their felt-need and lead them to Christ.

Some things you may want to consider when writing and giving your testimony:

Theme: An effective testimony has a central issue that is a problem before Christ and is resolved in conversion.

Conversion: When relating our conversion experience, we want to keep it clear, simple, and *repeatable*.

Language: When speaking to unsaved or unchurched people, avoid “Christianese.” For example, “You need a personal savior.” As opposed to what, an impersonal one? “He’s a born again Christian.” Doesn’t one have to be born again to be a Christian? What does “born again” mean to someone who has never read the Bible? The term even threw Nicodemus, and he was a Pharisee!

Length: Paul’s testimony in Acts can be read in about four minutes. Four minutes of your life can change somebody else’s for eternity!

1 Tim 1:12-17

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

13 Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

14 The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst.

16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. NIV

Our testimonies can be used of God to show the world His patience and mercy and the reality of a changed life. One of the big lies of the world system is that “people never change.” The testimony of changed lives by the power of Jesus Christ stands as a living truth against that cynical lie. God does change lives. We are to be witnesses of what the Lord has done in our lives.

Giving our testimony is non-optional. It is commanded by the Lord.

Matt 10:32-33

32 "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. NIV

2 Tim 2:11-13

11 Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him;

12 if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us;

13 if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself. NIV

1 Tim 6:11-16

11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

13 In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you

14 to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 which God will bring about in his own time-God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords,

16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. NIV

May we be found faithful witnesses of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.