

## ***Why Prepare a Personal Testimony?***

In his first letter the Apostle Peter challenges us in this manner: “Always be prepared to give and answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have” (1Peter 3:15). One of the most effective tools you have for sharing your faith is the story of how Jesus Christ gave you eternal life and how He has enriched your life. The Apostle John wrote, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard” (1John 1:3). John was testifying of his relationship to Jesus Christ.

When the Apostle Paul stood before King Agrippa (Acts 26), he told him simply, logically, and clearly about his life before salvation, how he met Christ, and what his life was like after conversion. Paul’s testimony takes three to four minutes to read aloud in a conversational manner.

Although it is necessary to write out your testimony, the purpose is not to memorize it and give it verbatim. The purpose is to help you express your experience with words so your hearer can understand what has happened to you. The choice of the right words, the flow of your story, and knowing how to begin and how to end are all important.

As you begin this project, ask the Lord for wisdom and insight in just how to share your story. Be open to suggestions from others. Many people have said that this work on their testimony has been extremely beneficial. And because time was taken to sharpen this tool – having “an answer to everyone” many have come to Christ. Trust God to help you and work hard. Give time, thought and prayer to this important part of discipleship.

## ***Preparing a Personal Testimony: General Comments***

### *1. Primary Aim*

The primary aim is for you to complete and present your personal salvation testimony from an outline on a 3”x 5” card.

### *2. Number of drafts*

The amount of time and effort it will take to prepare your personal salvation testimony will vary greatly from person to person. This has little to do with your intelligence or spirituality. It is the result of the complexity of your story. Some testimonies are extremely difficult to communicate clearly. Some have to be condensed to proper length. Others need to be expanded. So there are many factors which influence how long it will take you to complete your written personal testimony. If yours comes quickly and easily, don’t be proud. And if the preparation seems to be more difficult for you than others, don’t be discouraged. Be consistent in prayer for yourself and others that might join you in this important exercise.

### *3. Difficult but Rewarding*

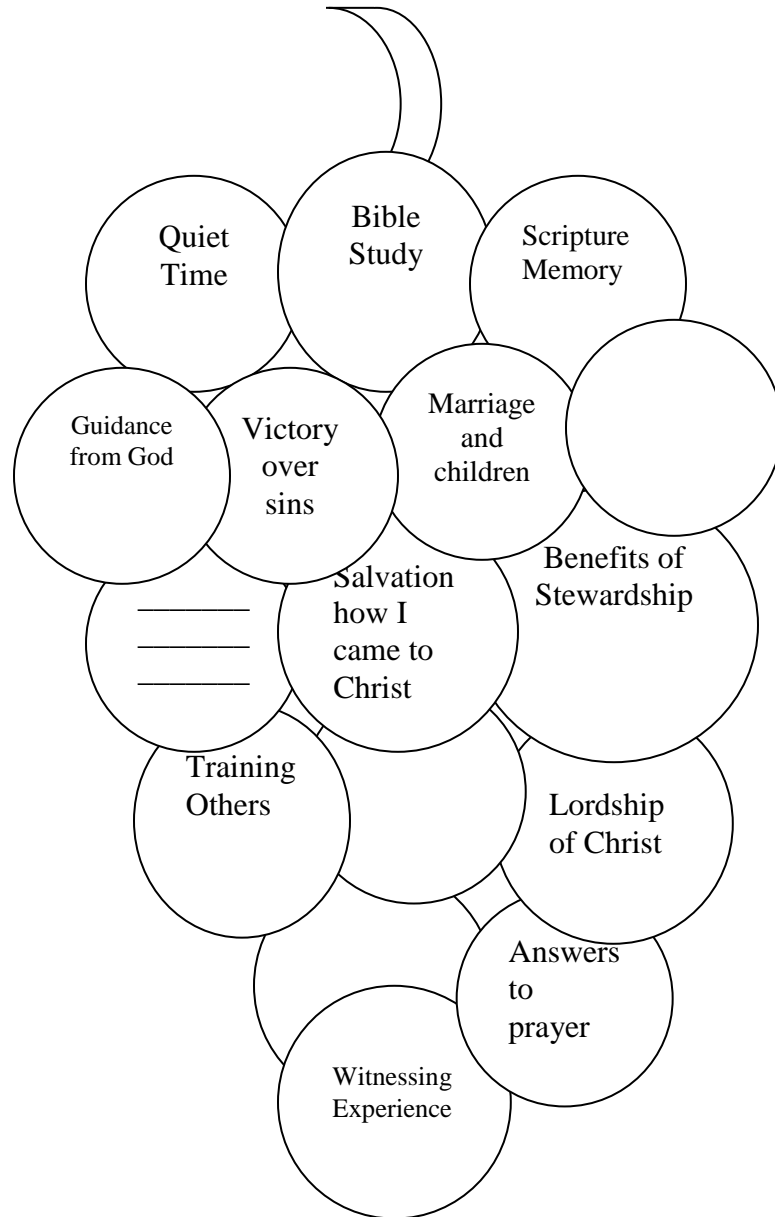
Many find this work on the personal testimony to be difficult and sometimes discouraging. On the other hand many find it to be most profitable and stimulating. Your attitude and how aggressively you do your work can make all the difference. Work hard! Pray for God’s wisdom and guidance.

## ***Helps for Preparing Your Personal Testimony***

Testimonies can be prepared on many subjects and tailored for various audiences. The testimony that is of the first priority is your salvation testimony. This testimony will be designed to give to a non-Christian and will be best suited for one-on-one sharing or in a small group. It will serve as a “door opener,” not a “convincing tool.” Many people are not ready to be convinced that they need Christ, but can be often led to talk about the Gospel after an inoffensive presentation of a personal testimony.

### ***The Grape Illustration***

Various types of testimonies one can accumulate through Christian experience.



1. The General Outline of a Personal Salvation Testimony
  - a. Before – a short sketch of what your life was like before you became a Christian.
  - b. How – specific steps you took in becoming a Christian
  - c. After – relating to the changes in your life as a result of having received Christ.
2. Guidelines for Preparing More Specific Content
  - a. Make it sound conversational. Prepare it to be spoken. Avoid literary sounding statements like, “I view the crimson sunset and pondered.” Use your informal vocabulary.
  - b. Say “I” and “me,” not “you” (share, don’t preach). This helps keep the testimony warm and personal. People like to hear experiences of others told in the first person.
  - c. Avoid religious words, phrases, and jargon

<b>Religious Words</b>	<b>Possible Substitutes</b>
Believe	Invited Christ to come into my life through prayer
Sin	Disobedience, breaking God’s laws, turning my back on God
Went forward	Decided to turn my life over to God
Under the blood	God forgave me of my failures
Accepted Christ	Same as believe above
Saved	Became a Christian, was delivered from the consequences of disobedience
Prayed through	Sincerely prayed
Christian	Committed Christian, real Christian

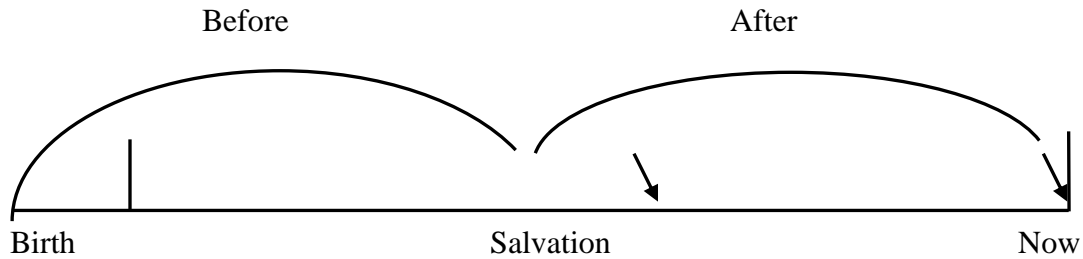
- d. Generalize so more people can identify with your story. Don’t name specific churches, denominations, or groups. Avoid using dates and ages. (Poor: “I was seven years old when I became a Christian.” “We moved to the city in 1989.”)
- e. Include some humor and human interest. When a person smiles or laughs, it reduces tension. Humor is disarming and increases attention.
- f. One or two word pictures increases interest. Don’t just say, “I grew up on my folks farm.” You might briefly describe the farm so a person can visualize it.
- g. In the “before,” include both good and bad aspects of your life. Have a cushion of interesting non-spiritual material at the beginning.
  - (1) Examples of “good aspects” – wanted to excel, desire for education, concern for others, hard-working.
  - (2) Examples of “bad aspects” – selfish, inferiority complex, get ahead at any cost, temper, greed for finances.
- h. In the “how”...

- (1) Communicate the Gospel clearly and briefly. You need to include:
    - (a) The fact of sin
    - (b) The penalty for sin
    - (c) Christ's payment of the penalty
    - (d) The requirement to receive Christ
  - (2) Make the Bible the authority.
    - (a) Poor "Bill shared with me that I failed and needed forgiveness."
    - (b) Good: "Bill shared with me that the Bible said ..."
  - (3) Use the word *pray* when referring to receive Christ. The word *pray* communicates what a person needs to do. (Good: "I prayed and asked Christ to come into my life and give me the gift of eternal life.")
  - i. *In the "after," rapidly conclude with two or three personal benefits of becoming a Christian.* (These may be current benefits.) The last sentence of your testimony should be something like, "But the greatest benefit is that I know I have eternal life." Or, "Now I know that God is always there for me." The listener often comments on the last thing you say in your testimony. If the listener's comment is on eternal life, the door is open for presenting the Gospel to him.
  - j. *Avoid dogmatic statements which skeptics can question.* Some examples are:
    - (1) Poor: "I prayed and I know Christ came in."
    - (2) Poor: "God has given me a wonderful husband (or wife or three children)."
    - (3) Good: "I prayed and asked Christ into my life. Since then I have experienced peace ..."
  - k. *Sound adult, not juvenile.* Reflect an adult point of view even if you were converted at an early age.
    - (1) Poor: "Bill Smith, Thomas Van Buren, and his cousin Ed Matthews came by my office at Acme Plumbing and Appliance Company..."
    - (2) "Bill and two other men talked to me at work one day..."
    - (3) Combine information like, "After living in five states and attending six universities, I found myself at my first engineering job."
3. *The Sequence of Your Preparation*
- a. Before you begin writing, pray for God's help. Look to Him for wisdom and insight as you work on your testimony.
  - b. Accumulate brief notes on three separate sheets of paper labeled BEFORE, HOW and AFTER.
  - c. Write out your first draft, using your notes from the three sheets of paper. (It will usually take 5 minutes or more to read it.) Apply the 12 guidelines.
  - d. Make improvements on the long draft. Get someone to help you with this step.
  - e. Cut your draft down to between two-and-one-half and three minutes when you read it. Again, get help with this from a friend.
  - f. Outline your presentation on a 3 x 5 card. Learn to give your testimony using only your outline.
  - g. Learn to give your testimony in three to four minutes without the outline.

## ***Two Testimony Formats***

1. *Chronological*

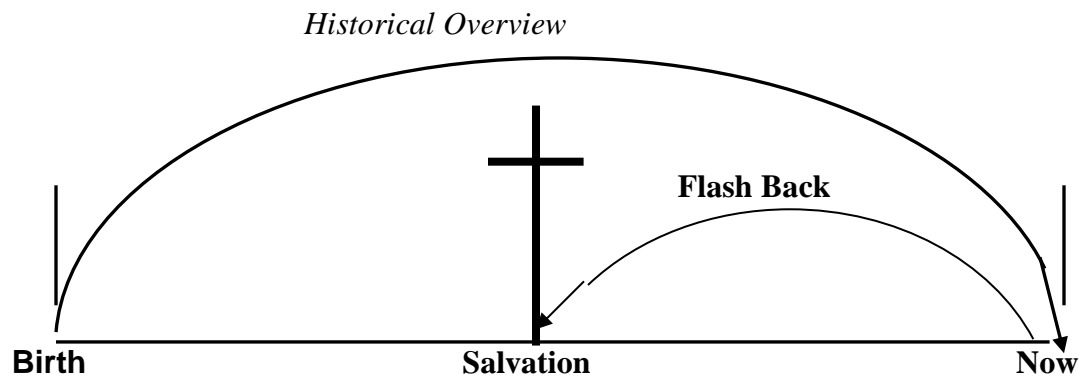
In this approach you tell your story in the chronological sequence in which it happened.



You might use this format:

- a. If you were converted later in life.
  - b. If you have enough interesting material to share prior to your conversion
  - c. If your conversion experience takes up most of your testimony because of the vitality and impact of the *how*. The *before* would then be relatively short.
2. *Overview / Flashback*

In this approach you give an interesting, rapid overview of your life right up to the present. This overview takes the place of the *before* in your testimony.



Then flash back to the spiritual dimension of your life. The flashback may go directly back to the *how* or just before the *how*. This means that some *before* might end up in your flashback. You might use this format:

- a. If you came to Christ at an early age.
- b. If you had a drab early life, but have had a more interesting adult life.
- c. If your *how* is very short.

### ***Common Pitfalls in Initial Testimony Preparation***

1. Too Cautious on the First Draft. Many people have a tendency to be too particular on the rough drafts. You are not attempting to make a perfect presentation the first time. *Get something on paper! Get a lot on paper!* It is easier to cut something down than to expand it.
2. Too much Reminiscing
  - a. Some become depressed because of too much introspection or review of past unhappy experiences.
  - b. Some have a tendency to “replay” and “relive” past events so much that the actual written work gets left undone.
  - c. Some become too preoccupied with trying to reconcile old conflicts.
3. Introducing Spiritual Material Too Soon. Starting with spiritual and Christian material too early in the testimony is not good. Let the prospect get acquainted with you as a person first. Also, the content may be too spiritually oriented all the way through. Let the prospect get to know you as another human being.
4. Worrying Too Much About When You Were Converted. Often, there are several possible times when an individual may have been converted. A friend or small group leader can help you sort this out from your own experience. As you ponder this matter, you will often come up with new insights about yourself. If your situation is particularly complicated, another qualified person can help you analyze your experience in more detail. In the meantime, put in writing the things that are clear to you.
5. Procrastinating Because It Is a Hard Assignment. It will definitely take you several intense hours of work to complete this project. Putting it off will not make it easier. The sooner you jump into the work, the sooner you will be enjoying the finished product.