

You Have A Story to Tell

Written by Jay Lowder
Monday, 01 March 2010 10:04 AM EST



Many Christians don't share their faith because they aren't Bible experts. But all you really need to do is tell your testimony.

It was one of those days when you feel paralyzed by responsibilities. My nerves were raw and my patience had slipped into a coma. My wife was unable to meet the cable-TV repairman, so I was left with the “blessing” of being in charge of the meet-and-greet.

Running 10 minutes late for the appointment, I called from my cell phone to let him know I was on my way. Seconds after he accepted my lame excuses and cordially said he would be waiting, God brought a thought to my mind. *Does this man have a relationship with Christ?*

I confess I immediately began to tell God all the reasons I was too busy to engage in a lengthy discussion, not to mention that I was in the wrong frame of mind to try and “win” somebody to Christ. As I frantically sped home, the wrestling match in my heart was in full swing until I was pinned to the mat of conviction.

A mile from home I reluctantly told God: “OK, Lord, I will tell him about Your forgiveness. But it’s going to be quick!”

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As I jumped out of my truck a sharp guy in his mid-20s greeted me with a handshake. He seemed very friendly. I welcomed him into my house and began to inquire how long the installation would take. He replied that it would take less than 10 minutes. I instantly felt the squeeze of urgency upon my heart.

As he crouched on his knees to open a cardboard box, I spontaneously fired off my question. After all, I had a captive audience.

“Have you ever really met Jesus and accepted Him as your Savior?” I asked. “Or do you only know about Him?”

Instantly, he stopped unwrapping and began to look at the floor. After a prolonged delay, he looked up with watery eyes and said: “I can’t believe you asked me that. I’m married, have a 12-month-old daughter and my marriage is on the rocks.”

He went on to explain that the night before, he had told his wife that maybe they should start attending church somewhere. And he admitted that earlier in the day he had asked God for a sign of what he should do.

I was stunned by the dramatic way God had brought into my home a distressed stranger who was unashamed to show emotion and express his desire for God.

I briefly shared my testimony of how I accepted Christ at age 21. It was nothing impressive. It certainly was not a doctrinal dissertation. It was gritty and real, and I felt anointed as I shared from my heart.

Once I finished, he asked if I thought God would forgive him. I assured him of God’s love and told him how he could call out to Jesus in prayer for salvation. With visible tears and a creaky voice, he asked if I would be willing to pray with him.

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Right then, while we both knelt on the floor, we prayed to God. This young man became a new believer. It was an unforgettable moment and an experience I have been privileged to have similarly with waiters, waitresses, maids, cab drivers, pizza deliverers and even car mechanics.

It's Easier Than You Think

Of all the tools God gives us to reach people, one of the most effective is a personal testimony. People can debate Scripture all day, but they cannot argue with a personal encounter.

When I first became a believer I organized a street-witnessing team that targeted the clubs and bars of the downtown area of our city. It didn't take me long to realize that skeptical people who often weren't interested in hearing the Bible quoted were usually open to listen to someone's story. I was also amazed by how often God would lead me to people who had faced some of the same struggles, doubts, addictions, sins and weaknesses that I had.

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 1:4 that God comforts us so that we can comfort others who have encountered our same difficulties. This revelation constantly stokes the spiritual fire in my heart. My painful past can be used as a catalyst to reach others.

I would never have dreamed that my tainted past of struggling with alcohol and suicide could be so effective in enabling me to relate to others.

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Yet whenever I went to talk about Jesus on the streets, I saw some of the most incredible miracles and salvations take place among dancers, drunks and druggies in the parking lots of bars and topless nightclubs. Even though I now preach in churches all over the world, some of my fondest memories are of those early days when we pounded the pavement, not under spotlights but under streetlights and the stars of heaven.

I did not have any biblical training that would enable me to defend Scripture, but I did know Jesus and what He had done in my life. Even though our entire team of more than 20 college students had a lot more zeal than knowledge, we were not without the anointing and touch of God.

During this time, I often read the Bible story of the Samaritan woman recorded in John 4. This broken woman had a personal encounter with Jesus, and then she told others about Him. She actually preached to all the men of her city, and they came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

She was not trained as an evangelist or an apologist, yet God was able to use her to do something remarkable. Of course this does not negate our need for biblical training.

We are called to handle the “word of truth” properly and to study to show ourselves approved (see 1 Tim. 4:16, 2 Tim. 2:15, NKJV). But I have met believers who avoid witnessing because they want to wait until they understand the Bible better. Don’t wait! You have a story to tell now!

We find in the book of Acts that the apostle Paul frequently shared his testimony. Numerous times he told people about his conversion experience on his way to Damascus to validate the reality of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. Whether he was standing before the Jerusalem mob in Acts 22 or before royalty, such as King Agrippa in Acts 26, Paul always shared how salvation through Jesus had transformed his life.

On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given to empower and fill believers to do the work of Christ, Peter preached a sermon that helped launch the early church. What did he share? A testimony of how he had seen the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

I have never known any Christian who was able to maintain his or her fire for Christ who is not a personal witness. Sadly, many preachers today are willing to preach Jesus from their pulpits but

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are unwilling to be witnesses in their daily lives. This is God's call to each and every one of us. No one is exempt!

Often we are tempted to think that unbelievers are unwilling to hear the gospel. Actually, it is usually Christians who are unwilling to share it. If you really believe in the gospel then you will be willing to mention it.

We will always talk about what's dearest to us. We are told in Matthew 12:34 that it is "out of the abundance of the heart" that the mouth speaks. What do you talk about most?

Here are some helpful tips to better equip you to share your testimony with people who need to know Christ:

1. Write out your testimony. Articulating on paper how you met Jesus will enable you to remember, refine and recount. This cultivates an awareness of where you would be if you had not come to faith, and where others will be if they don't find His forgiveness.

Putting your story on paper (and online) also has a way of stirring up gratitude for the grace He has given you.

Revelation 12:11 says "they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and *the word of their testimony*" (emphasis added). If you cannot identify a time when you repented of sin and accepted Jesus as Savior, pray right now for salvation.

2. Ask to be filled with His Spirit. This should not be a one-time experience but a continual seeking of a fresh infilling. This is where the power and boldness comes from to make you effective. Without the Holy Spirit's anointing you will be fearful and nonproductive.

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All through Acts, when the disciples were truly filled with God's power they also were granted boldness. Everyone claiming to be Spirit-filled should be proclaiming the salvation of Christ.

3. Ask for a heart for the unsaved. When is the last time you were truly broken that someone you knew was in danger of eternal separation from God? All around us people are living quietly in pain and hopelessness.

This world is caught in a web of divorce, financial ruin, addictions, guilt, shame, depression and despair. For many, we may be their only hope of hearing the gospel. Matthew 9:36 says, "But when Jesus saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them." Jesus should be our model.

4. Ask God for opportunities. If you are sincere in this request, the Lord will not deny you. He will open doors for you to share His love.

I prayed this prayer one December morning and left my house only to find a stranger one block away on his knees in a field, praying for help. His wife had kicked him out of the house, and he found a cross that had been placed by a nearby Methodist church. After I shared with this man he accepted Christ and is living for Jesus to this day.

There is no greater joy than knowing God used you to lead someone to Jesus. It is not only the command of Christ but also the most rewarding of life's accomplishments.

You can leave an eternal legacy when you share your story. What we do in this life echoes throughout all eternity because what is not eternal is eternally useless.

Your story is His story. I encourage you to share it often.

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HOW TO SHARE

Go to testimony.charismamag.com to find examples of how some well-known Christians use their testimony to win unbelievers to Christ.

Go Ahead, Break the Ice!

The biggest roadblock to evangelism is beginning a conversation. Here's how to get started.

I know many Christians who want to share their faith, but they struggle with finding a way to begin. There is no specific formula. God wants us to be spontaneous as we trust Him to give us the words.

These suggestions will help you start the conversation:

1. Discuss spirituality. You might ask, "Do you attend church anywhere?" Regardless of the answer, try to steer away from getting caught up in a discussion about religion or "your" church. Many people have had negative church experiences. But this can still be a great door opener. Keep the focus on Christ because religion doesn't change lives, Jesus does.

2. Find common ground. "Where did you grow up? Tell me about your family, where you went to school and your job." People love to talk about themselves. Asking engaging questions about

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someone's life (and being a great listener) equips you to identify needs and life experiences. This enables you to understand how your testimony relates to their situation.

3. Be sincerely honest. Say: "I'm sorry that I haven't talked to you about something really important that has happened in my life" or "I'm so nervous to discuss this, but it's something I feel I have to do."

Be open about your feelings of fear and intimidation. This is especially important when talking to family members and friends: those you've known a long time. Sharing your faith with a family member can be difficult.

4. Pray before a meal. Say: "I always pray before I eat, and I was wondering if you have any specific prayer request." Some people you meet only once, such as a restaurant server.

You will be amazed how offering to pray for them leads to open doors to share your faith. Numerous waitresses have broken down in tears and shared their deepest pain after I have asked this question.

5. Ask their permission. "Can I tell you an unbelievable story?" Everyone loves a good story, and this works with close friends or even casual acquaintances.

Explain candidly how you realized your need for Christ and what a relationship with Him means to you. Offer to pray with them to accept Jesus.

6. Be completely blunt. "Have you given your entire life to Jesus Christ?" Some people really respond to this approach even though it is not as common.

You don't always have the time to develop a lengthy conversation with a passing stranger, yet the Holy Spirit wants you to share with them. In such an encounter, this may be your only

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chance. Swallow your fears and share your faith with confidence.