

The Testimony
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Acts 22:3-8; 15-22

What comes to mind when you hear the word “testimony?” How is sharing your personal story an effective way to tell people about Christ? What is scary about sharing your personal “testimony?”

In today’s text, the Apostle Paul shares his own personal story of how he came to faith in Christ. If you and I think we’ve faced a hostile audience in sharing our stories, Paul has us beat in that department!

- Big Idea: The gospel transforms people from sinners into instruments of God. Sharing our testimony of how He changed us can be an effective way to share the good news of the gospel. We need to be ready to share.
- Before we read the passage, here is some context:
- Paul made his way to Jerusalem to observe Pentecost.
- As usual Paul was greeted with a mixed reaction to his teaching:
 - There was warmth from the followers of Christ who glorified God for how He had been using Paul among the Gentiles.
 - Then there was violent hostility from the hard line Jews who were spreading rumors that Paul was “...*teaching all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn their backs on the laws of Moses...[that Paul was teaching them]...not to circumcise their children or follow other Jewish customs.*”¹
- This hostility came to the boiling point a week later when Paul was in the temple. A group of Jews from Asia accused Paul of teaching against the law of Moses, and bringing a Gentile into a restricted part of the temple.
- These Jews worked the people up into a mob intent on killing Paul.

- The Roman military showed up to put down the riot. They couldn't get the straight story so they physically removed Paul from the crowd.
- As the soldiers took him up the steps to the barracks to question him, Paul asked for permission to speak to the angry mob.
- When he spoke in Hebrew, the crowd grew quiet – for a few minutes.

Acts 22:3–8 (NLT)

³ Then Paul said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. ⁴ And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. ⁵ The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the followers of the Way from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished.

⁶ "As I was on the road, approaching Damascus about noon, a very bright light from heaven suddenly shone down around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

⁸ " 'Who are you, lord?' I asked.

"And the voice replied, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, the one you are persecuting.'

- Then Paul told about a believer in Christ named Ananias whom God supernaturally sent to be the "instrument" to give Paul back his sight, but more importantly, to give Paul his "marching orders. He quoted Ananias:"

Acts 22:14–22 (NLT)

¹⁴ "Then he told me, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. ⁱⁱ

¹⁵ For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.'

¹⁷ “After I returned to Jerusalem, I was praying in the Temple and fell into a trance. ¹⁸ I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me, ‘Hurry! Leave Jerusalem, for the people here won’t accept your testimony about me.’

¹⁹ “ ‘But Lord,’ I argued, ‘they certainly know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. ²⁰ And I was in complete agreement when your witness Stephen was killed. I stood by and kept the coats they took off when they stoned him.’

²¹ “But the Lord said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!’ ”

- **Why did Paul give his testimony instead of preaching a sermon?**
- Not every believer is called to preach; but every believer is called to share.
- **How might sharing our testimony fall short as an evangelism tool?**
- Jordan Monson writes, *“Testimonies can be a valuable way to share the good news about Jesus. But in a society where even Christians are steeped in rampant individualism and self-idolatry, our testimonies can easily sound like another story of self-congratulation. Though some personal testimonies are on the mark, many boil down to this: “Look! God is great because me me me.” These are not road-to-Damascus stories, but spiritually tinted selfies.”*
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/your-testimony-isn-t-about-you>
- The point: Our personal testimony should be more about God than us.
- Look at Paul’s testimony in this text. It can be broken down into three major sections.
 1. Former life before Christ [vv 3-5; 19-20] (“...as all of you are.”)
 2. Life-changing encounter with Christ [vv 6-14; 17-18]
 3. New purpose in Christ [vv 14-16; 21]
- If someone asked you to share your story of how Jesus changed your life, would you be confident? Do you have an “elevator speech” to share?

- Let's do a quick exercise you can finish later at home using that outline.
 1. What was your life like before Christ? Remember, not everyone has a dramatic testimony – no “testimony shaming!”
 2. Tell me about your life-changing experience with Christ.
 3. How has that changed your purpose in life?
- **Let's brainstorm, what are some thoughts on the purpose of the life of a Christ follower?**

Matthew 22:37–40 (NLT)

³⁷ Jesus replied, “ ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

Matthew 28:18–20 (NLT)

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

- In his book “The Purpose Driven Life,” Rick Warren presents a pretty good summary of living out the great commandment and the great commission:
 - **“Love God with all your Heart”**: You were planned for God’s pleasure, so your purpose is to love God through *worship*.
 - **“Love your neighbor as yourself”**: You were shaped for serving, so your purpose is to show love for others through *ministry*.
 - **“Go and make disciples”**: You were made for a mission, so your purpose is to share God’s message through *evangelism*.
 - **“Baptize them into...”**: You were formed for God’s family, so your purpose is to identify with his church through *fellowship*.

- **“Teach them to do all things...”**: You were created to become like Christ, so your purpose is to grow to maturity through *discipleship*.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Example from Cross Pointe Church here in the Atlanta area: http://www.crosspointechurch.com/downloads/pdf_files/pdf_sharingyourtestimony.pdf
- We kind of left you hanging with Paul and the mob. He had just said:

²¹ “But the Lord said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!’ ”

²² The crowd listened until Paul said that word. Then they all began to shout, “Away with such a fellow! He isn’t fit to live!”

- Some will react negatively to our testimony, but we can’t water down the truth. The “hot button” word for them was “Gentiles.” **What is a “hot button” truth we must share that may offend people today?** (Clue: John 14:6)

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- The gospel transforms people from sinners into instruments of God. Sharing our testimony of how He changed us can be an effective way to share the good news of the gospel.
- Are we really prepared to do that in a concise and compelling way?
- If not, we CAN BE prepared by spending some time developing our “elevator speech” about what Jesus has done in our lives.
- Even though it’s our own story, we need to make sure it’s about Him and what He’s done for us and not just about us.
- Being ready to share our story reminds us of these words from Jesus,

Matthew 5:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 10:32 (ESV)

³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,

- Not every believer is called to preach; but every believer is called to share.

ⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ac 21:21). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱ NIV: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth.'ⁱⁱ

ⁱⁱⁱ Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life*. Zondervan, 2006.