

“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.”

1 Peter 3:15-16

Believe it or not, your life can be an inspiration to the many people around you who do not know God’s personal love for them. This passage points out that we must be able to explain why we live such full lives!

Your testimony is an effective tool for witnessing to your faith for many reasons:

You are the walking proof that the Good News is real

No one can deny what happened to you or argue with your personal experience

It is non-confrontational

When you share your personal story with someone, it does not appear that you are trying to convince them of anything.

People are touched because you are opening your life to them.

It makes the facts of salvation, the reality of God's Kingdom, concrete, real, specific and personal. It puts flesh and bones on the truths of salvation.

Pope Francis summarized all of this well in *Evangelii Gaudium*, 13:

"Memory is a dimension of our faith which we might call "deuteronomic", not unlike the memory of Israel itself. Jesus leaves us the Eucharist as the Church's daily remembrance of, and deeper sharing in, the event of his Passover (cf. Lk 22:19). The joy of evangelizing always arises from grateful remembrance: it is a grace which we constantly need to implore. The apostles never forgot the moment when Jesus touched their hearts: 'It was about four o'clock in the afternoon' (Jn 1:39). Together with Jesus, this remembrance makes present to us "a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1), some of whom, as believers, we recall with great joy: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God" (Heb 13:7). Some of them were ordinary people who were close to us and introduced us to the life of faith: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice" (2Tim 1:5) The believer is essentially "one who remembers".

Preparing Your Three-Minute Testimony

The Interview

First, simply recall the events surrounding the moment (or series of moments) when you decided to place Jesus at the centre of your life.

You can do this in two ways:

You may take this PLT home with you and answer the questions by writing them down on a page or in a journal

You may choose to be interviewed by your trainer: they will ask you questions and take notes while you speak

Here is a list of questions to help unfold your story. Note that you may not have a clear answer for every question. There are a variety of stories, so there are a variety of questions to help get to the heart of yours.

1. The Before

What was your life like before knowing Jesus as your Lord and Saviour? How would you characterize your relationship with God at that time? How did this affect your relationships, feelings, attitudes and actions?

Define the need or problem.

Key question: What was your view of God?

What caused you to begin considering God/Christ as a solution to your needs?

2. The Central Turning Point

Was there a person or a group of people who invited you to think more deeply about God?

What was it about these people and what they communicated to you that brought you to a clearer understanding of Jesus?

At what time in your life did you really understand that Jesus died on the cross for you, to save you from your sin and weakness?

Try to answer at least one of the two following questions clearly:

What was the turning point? (can be a time period or a series of events, not necessarily just one moment)

Did you make a decision to live for Jesus? How?

3. The Now

From what has Jesus rescued you?

How is your relationship with Jesus different?

How has your life changed since you have invited Jesus to be at the centre of your life?

What other benefits have you experienced since placing Jesus at the centre of your life?

Your Draft

Now that you have seen how God brought you to make a decision to put Him at the centre of your life, you can write it in a way that others will understand. A three-minute testimony has three sections:

The Before: This refers to the time in your life before your conversion.

The Central Turning-Point: This refers to the moment or season of your conversion, the time of realizing your need for Jesus.

The Now: This section explains your new relationship with God and how it has changed your life.

Use the notes from your interview to write your first draft in these three sections. Note that, for the first draft, it's usually helpful to not worry too much about length. You can always edit it down later, and it's often a personally meaningful experience to simply get everything out on paper for the first time. Once that's done, here are some helpful hints:

Identify Your Theme

Within every testimony, there is a core message or theme. Recognizing yours will help your hearers know where they are in the story, and where you're headed. It will also help you in recognizing the difference between important and unnecessary details of your story. Articulating it in terms of either the problem to be solved or the beauty of what you've found can engage both you and your listeners in the drama of what God has done in your life. Some common themes include:

Keeping God at a distance

Trying to fill your heart with anything but God

Freedom through forgiveness

Overcoming addictions

Discovering your dignity and worth

Recognizing the incredible gift of salvation/the faith

Fear

Feeling the need to earn salvation (résumé mindset)

Not trusting God due to painful experiences

Taking the faith for granted

Your Theme Here

The important thing isn't that your theme fits one of the ones listed above, but that it is yours and you can articulate it clearly. Your trainer should be able to help you identify yours if you are having trouble.

You may also find you have several themes to choose from. Your 3 minute testimony should centre on the most pivotal one in terms of your conversion. The other themes or challenges you faced with Christ may be well worth telling in the right context, but the story of your conversion is the most fundamental and important to develop for your evangelistic witness.

The Before

Setup your theme. A simple one-liner or question to start your testimony will do. "My story is really about _____" is sufficient and effective, but feel free to be creative and even a bit jarring with your opening line, like "I once thought God was a myth and religious people were unintelligent." Either approach will help give your hearers a reason to listen to the rest of your story as they now want to hear the reason for and resolution to your opening line. There's drama now!

Give some background about you (be brief).

Do not overemphasize the bad things that happened. This can be distracting and can glorify sin. State things simply and directly without getting into too much detail. For example, “I used to party too much and abuse alcohol to numb the pain in my life” is fine. “I used to go out every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday to at least 3 different bars after pre-drinking a fifth of vodka” is starting to sound like bragging about sin. Be specific when focusing in on *important* events or aspects. However, don’t include *unnecessary* detail about people, groups, or situations (see “Some Other Tips” below) Own up to your mistakes. Our testimonies should not blame anyone else. Leave out incriminating names and details.

The Central Turning-Point

Keep it simple, clear and repeatable.

Give specific details of what happened so that someone would have a model to follow in committing their life to Christ.

This is the main point of this section! We want people to understand how they can make a decision for Christ, too.

Be specific.

Concentrate on Christ and what he did for you.

If conversion happened over a period of time, share the content of what you realized as you began to open your life to Christ's forgiveness and leadership.

For Example: “During that semester at school, somehow the depth and truth of the death and resurrection of Jesus became incredibly real to me – so real that everyone could tell I had become a different, happier person.” Or,

“I can’t pinpoint an exact moment over the course of the year where something specific happened to me, but I can tell you right now the result of it is that I know God loves me! I know that Jesus died on the cross for me! I feel Him close to me every day and I know He has given me forgiveness and hope!”

NOTE: your theme should be very obvious in this section. Your hearers should feel this is connecting the dots or unanswered questions from your opening line/problem to be solved

The Now

Was there one key Scripture verse that had an impact on you?

Give concrete differences in your life.

Share the benefits of having a new (or deeper) relationship with Christ (e.g. new outlook on life, forgiveness, freedom from fear and anger, etc.).

Do not give the impression that everything is now 100%, but instead share how Christ helps you in your struggles (e.g. "I still become afraid, but the difference is now I know I am not alone.").

Invite/challenge your audience to look at giving Jesus a chance.

Have a definite ending; it could be a question or challenge that requires a response or a statement to glorify God.

NOTE: this section should clearly wrap up the "drama" of your theme. Questions that may have been raised should be answered and all the dots connected so the hearers can connect with the resolution. Any questions raised that are still open in your life should be directly acknowledged with a sincere hope for answers to come: "I still don't have all the answers but now I know that God is my loving Father, and I trust Him to help me find them all in time"

Writing a three minute testimony may take several drafts. Do not worry about length at first, just write it all down. Together with your trainer, you will be able to decide what is important to share and what information is dispensable. You will likely need to go back and forth with your trainer to get the whole story down into a powerful, concise, three-minute story.

Tips for Refining Your Testimony

Here some final tips to make sure you have a great, relatable testimony:

Using people's names in a testimony can make new people feel more like an outsider. Use more generic terms.

Example: say "A CCO staff member invited me to be in a Discovery faith study," not, "Lorne invited me to..."

Be sure there are no CCO-isms. If you want to mention names of events and faith studies, always explain what they are. It's best if you can find a way to say it generically without needing an explanation

Example: "I met CCO during Mission Week" should be replaced by "I met CCO at a table at the beginning of the semester, and left my contact info..."

Avoid Christian jargon, such as, "I was on fire with the Holy Spirit," or, "it was on my heart."

Communicate sensitive personal aspects in a discreet yet real way.

For example: sexual immorality could be explained by saying, "I was caught up in unhealthy and impure relationships".

Suicidal thoughts could be explained by saying, "I had gotten so low I did not see why I should go on living."

Tips on Practice and Delivery (for giving your testimony at an event)

Before the day of the event:

Refine your draft to a potential final draft

Practice your testimony out loud once. Note any sections that feel unnatural or forced and try saying them out loud without your script in a concise, natural way. Write down that more natural version

Practice out loud again, this time with a timer. Purposefully speak slowly and clearly.

Even at a “that felt a little too slow” pace, you should be under 3 minutes. If you are not, consider evaluating for unnecessary detail, explanations, or even whole stories (depending on how far over time you are).

Practice out loud with your trainer and anyone else you trust to give honest, constructive feedback and refine your testimony one final time.

Practice the final version out loud as much as you need to feel comfortable delivering it naturally.

On the day of the event:

Pray with great expectations that God will touch hearts through your sharing. Trust in His grace more than in your brilliance. You may face temptations to feel that this or that needs to be changed or that no one will “connect” with your story. This is normal. Share these thoughts with your trainer or another mature Christian and ask them to pray with you if needed.

Run through your testimony out loud a final time or two.

Breathe.

Speak slowly and clearly, with conviction.

Resist the temptation to go off-script. Assuming you’ve prepared well, in prayer, that little voice saying “add that back in” or “you should really explain that more” is probably just a distraction from the core message of what God has done in your life. Trust that He is speaking through you in the preparation you have done.

Stick to your script.

NOTE: This is just the last point over again because it is that important :-)