



giving your testimony

the MINISTRY PAPERS

over a coffee... over the fence... over to you

You know the situation. It's a friend at work. It's the next door neighbour. It's any one of a number of people in your life. The opportunity comes. But often when you least expect it...

"So this whole Christianity and church thing... how did you end up being a Christian anyway?"

Gulp. "Er..."

What comes next? It's a great opportunity. In fact, you might have even prayed for an opportunity like this. But are you prepared for it?

The great news, of course, is that God uses us in our weakness. God delights in using weak vessels to serve his purposes. The God who used a weak and despised cross to bring salvation can certainly use even our stumbling efforts to spread that message of salvation. Before we go any further let's be sure to lock that in. Salvation is God's work, through us.

As we will see in 1 Peter 3, however, that doesn't mean we shouldn't prepare ourselves to take such opportunities. We are called to be prepared to explain why our hope is in Christ. We are called to be prepared to give testimony to the hope that is found in Christ alone. There are many good reasons to prepare the story of how God worked in your life to bring you to a saving knowledge of Jesus as your Saviour and Lord.

That's what this ministry paper is all about. We'll discuss what a testimony is, types of testimony, use of testimonies and walk through the process of putting one together. You might still gulp. But hopefully you'll be more prepared for what to say next...

LEADERS: before taking someone through this paper, review the 2 key intro MINISTRY PAPERS: 'the ministry training church' and 'meeting one to one'.

Connect. Grow. Serve. After **connecting** to God through trusting in Christ, a vital way we can **grow** is through a growth group and a vital way we can **serve** is through a ministry team. This MINISTRY PAPER is designed to help your growth group leader encourage you to make the most of every opportunity to give the reason for your hope in Christ by sharing your testimony.



read **1 Peter 3:13-18a**

1. What/who are we tempted to fear (verse 14)?

2. How does remembering "Christ as Lord" (verse 15) change who we fear and whose opinion we're concerned about?

3. What sort of question does Peter expect Christians who live with Jesus as Lord to be asked regularly (verse 15)?

4. What should be a significant part of our answer (verse 18a)?

5. Do you consider yourself prepared to "give an answer"?



Before we go any further into the detail of what a testimony is and how to put one together, the assumption is that you have a testimony to tell—that you are a Christian. Is that the case? Write down in a sentence what you think it means to be a Christian.

not just for unbelievers

We have seen the importance of preparing a testimony for sharing with unbelievers about the hope found in Christ. But testimonies aren't just for sharing with unbelievers. They play just as important a role in spurring on other believers. It's always encouraging to hear God has worked in the lives of others. Testimonies remind us that God delights in using ordinary people like you and me to save others, and that he uses the one saving message in hundreds of different ways. Testimonies are great for encouraging each other to keep on with the gospel.



read **Hebrews 10:19-25**

1. What does verse 24 call us to consider?

2. What does verse 25 call us to do for each other?

3. What are all the things mentioned in the previous verses (19-23) that should form the basis of this spurring and encouraging?



4. How might preparing your testimony play a part in this ministry of encouragement to your brothers and sisters in Christ?

5. What does this passage remind us should be the focus of how Christians encourage each other?



what is a testimony?

At a "testimonial dinner", honour is given to the life and work of a significant person. A testimony is about giving honour to God pointing to the life and work of his Son as we tell the story of how we became a Christian.

Look at your answer in the previous 'ideas for discussion' on page 1. Did it point to Jesus and his death on the cross as both 1 Peter 3 and Hebrews 10 did?

EVERY testimony is spectacular...

When we run newcomers courses at church we invite any Christians attending to share their testimonies. It's always an encouraging time to hear how God has worked in different ways in different people's lives.

But sometimes we find that someone might reply, "oh, my testimony's pretty boring really... I just grew up in a Christian family ... learnt the Bible at church ... in fact I can't ever remember a time when I didn't know Jesus. I know my trust is in Jesus for salvation, but it's something that I just sort of grew up into".

Let's be clear: that's a GREAT testimony! That is a great work of God! Far from boring, it's a wonderful encouragement to Christian parents... and to Kids Church teachers ... and to all of us. It's a fantastic reminder that one of the ways God loves to bring people into his Kingdom is through families.

When Peter preached at Pentecost and invited people to turn to God "in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:28), he went on to say that "the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). Clearly, as we respond to the message of Christ, a huge part of this response is to share it with our children.

Of course, our children will have to accept or reject this message for themselves. But as Christian parents, we are given the great privilege and great responsibility to raise our children to know Jesus. And the least boring thing – the most exciting thing imaginable – would be to hear them say one day, "oh ... I grew up in a Christian family...".

Every testimony is spectacular!



it's all about Jesus

This page walks you through some principles for preparing a testimony. But let the most important one be stated up front: it's all about Jesus. While a testimony is your story, it's ultimately his story, especially of how he died to bring you forgiveness. You don't have to give a full gospel exposition but it's tragic to hear testimonies that fail to focus on Jesus and his death. Let's not forget that it's all about Jesus.

a sample testimony

BEFORE: I grew up in a church-going family & I went along to Sunday School until I was about 10 when my parents gave us the choice whether we wanted to go to church. It was a simple choice because church was boring and so that was it for me and church. But it wasn't quite it for me and God. Although my behaviour was getting further from his ways I couldn't shake a sneaking suspicion that he was *there*. Problem was, the God I thought was there was one that I thought was against me. If I could sum up my life before belonging to Jesus it'd be in the word "guilt".

AFTER: If I could describe my life now that I belong to Jesus it would be "free". I live with a sense of being set free from that guilt. I live with the knowledge that God is for me not against me. I live my life thankful for what he has done for me in Jesus.

That brings me to **WHAT BROUGHT THIS TURN AROUND:** It's definitely not that my behaviour has suddenly become perfect, far from it. No, the difference didn't come from *my* behaviour or something I managed to do. It came from hearing about the behaviour of someone else. I'm talking about Jesus. When I was about fifteen I was invited on a youth camp where I heard some talks on the "I am" statements of Jesus: I am the way the truth and the life; I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep; I am the resurrection and the life. It was amazing to be confronted with Jesus and his claims about himself and his claims on me. I learnt that God was angry with me, and yet that Jesus took that anger on himself at the cross, providing the way back to God—to be forgiven for running from God. It wasn't through my behaviour but Jesus' perfect life given in my place. That's an offer I couldn't refuse. And that's what changed my life.

how to give a testimony

A basic model for a testimony is like the 'Before and After' ads on TV. Paul talks this way in Ephesians 2:1-10: "You were... *but* God... *and now*". Paul tells their 'before' and 'after' story describing their lives before and after knowing Christ. And he keeps the focus on the thing that has made the difference: the gospel. It's a great 3-point pattern for a testimony:

1. Describe what life was like **before** you became a Christian.
2. Describe what life is like **now** you are a Christian.
3. Describe how the change came about: tell the **gospel**.

Notice that this model means you finish with the gospel. That's the real strength of it. The last thing you talk about, and therefore what you'll leave people thinking about, is the gospel of Jesus.

Maybe you can come up with a theme from your life that you can hang the gospel on e.g. the woman who was a citizen of two countries, had two weddings one in a Presbyterian church and one in a Greek Orthodox church, and who had two births: the physical one and the spiritual one.

don't

...be too long aim to get your testimony down to 3 minutes (that means 300 words for the average person—the example in the sidebar is 350)

...use jargon (have a go at the testimony jargon cart below)

...make yourself the main focus—it's a testimony to Jesus

do

...begin with a bang...and end with a bang

...keep it personal—remember it's a story not a sermon

testimony jargon chart

try to think of another way of describing each of the following

| | | | |
|---------------|--|-----------|--|
| Sin | | Christian | |
| Faith | | Grace | |
| Justification | | Saved | |



making opportunities

We started this paper thinking about making the most of opportunities to talk about the hope found in Jesus. The problem is that often we don't see the opportunities right in front of us. All the things that make up our everyday conversations over a coffee or over the fence can be easily turned into gospel conversations. Below is an example to get you started...

video testimonies

We have seen that we all need to be prepared to give an answer for our hope in Christ, not fearing people but remembering that Jesus alone is our Lord and it's him we obey. We have also seen that testimonies can be a great encouragement to the church and we should be regularly spurring one another on with the stories of God's work in our lives, bringing us to forgiveness through Jesus.

Testimonies in our Sunday gatherings can be especially encouraging to the whole body. Problem is, if some of us are tempted to be fearful about the thought of sharing our testimony one-to-one, the thought of sharing it to a large group of people can be overwhelming.

This is where video testimonies can be so useful. At first the thought of being on camera might sound just as intimidating. But most people find that it's a different story once you give it a go. The opportunity to be able to have a few goes at it or do the testimony one section at a time takes a lot of pressure off.

We all have a testimony to tell but we don't all feel equally gifted at telling it. Editing video material enables a flowing and clear story to be told. It can have greater impact than something that's too drawn out, and the fear of freezing in front of the crowd is now only there for the tech guy! It's not that the goal is to be slick, but it helps everyone rejoice in the work of God when a clear flowing story is given. Give it a go!

Testimony Interview

Another option for a testimony in church is through an interview:

1. What were you like before you came to know Jesus?
2. What is life like now that you are a Christian?
3. What made the difference? Tell us how you came to know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour?

"How about the price of petrol?"

Sorry to mention that. Or am I the only one sick of hearing about the price of petrol? And sick of *talking* about the price of petrol? And sick of endless speculation about the *future* price of petrol? "Not as sick as I am of paying for the stuff!", you might say. True. As an average tank approaches the \$100 mark, that hurts. And the shopping voucher hardly dents it at all.

We're funny creatures though. A lot of wealth has come into this country through the 'world resources boom'. No complaints there, right? But when that same boom (as I understand it, anyway) is a significant part of pushing up the blow at the bowser, the complaints gush forth. There's a strange part of us that somehow expects the world to become a better place, despite the evidence! Don't get me wrong. I'd love the prices to drop, not rise. Bring back the 43 cents per litre I paid when I was on my Ps in 1986! And I know for some families at SCPC, especially where work is tightly connected to fuel prices, the costs are far greater than just the tank for the family car. These events are very much hurting some financially.

But it is a vivid reminder about the fickle nature of this world. Indeed, the majority of people in this world are facing far greater hardship than fuel price hikes. And whoever we are on this planet, rich or poor, we all live in a world that is passing away. In 1 Corinthians in coming weeks, we'll hear Apostle Paul urging "those who use the things of this world", to live "as if not engrossed in them, for this world in its present form is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). I wouldn't know if we're about to start exhausting the world's oil resources or if it's just political games. But I do know for certain that they won't last forever. This world IS passing away. And this whole world will then face something far more drastic than a nasty fuel bill - giving account to God for their response to his precious Son's death for us (Hebrews 9:27). You wouldn't want to have your trust in anything in this world, would you? But trust rather in the one who, by his death and resurrection, carries you to the new creation.

So, as much as it hurts to see that climbing price on the servo signage, perhaps direct that frustration into something useful: the desire to tell people about eternal salvation through Jesus beyond this groaning world.



ideas for discussion

now try writing an outline for your testimony...

Grab a piece of paper and start writing under these 3 headings:

1. Describe what life was like **before** you became a Christian.
2. Describe what life is like **now** you are a Christian.
3. Describe how the change came about: tell the **gospel**.