

# SHARING YOUR FAITH THROUGH YOUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY

*"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have within you. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15)*

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## The Purpose

### THE TASK

God created each of us in His image to have a relationship with Him. But all of us have rebellious hearts and so are out of fellowship with God our Father. It is God's desire that all people would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus, being restored into fellowship with the Father and welcomed into heaven.

Once we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, we are not immediately taken up into heaven. We have a chance to mature, so we do not remain spiritual infants. There is also work for us to do here on earth as His ambassadors, as part of the Body of Christ, His church.

Part of our work as ambassadors is to fulfill the "Great Commission" of Matt. 28:19-20, to show others their need for restoration with God and to explain how that is done through faith in Jesus. For most of us, sharing this is an intimidating task. While in some cases that might simply be fear of stepping out in faith, it might also be that you are burdened because you feel that you are expected to be doing things that the Holy Spirit is not asking you to do.

This guide is to help equip you to better listen to the Spirit's leading and to become comfortable sharing what God has done for you with anyone who shows an interest. It is as simple as "*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*" (1 Peter 3:15)

## **YOUR ROLE - BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT**

Within the Body of Christ each of us has been given various spiritual gifts. These are talents uniquely suited for your personality. Each of us have different gifts, but all of us are valuable and indispensable to the Body. Part of our maturing as Christians is learning to use our gifts and learning to hear the Spirit's leading in any particular situation, rather than merely following the impulses of our flesh.

So, for each of us, it is important to have an understanding of the role that God has for you. For Timothy, the young pastor, Paul exhorted him to use the gift of evangelism that he had received. However, in his letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul said *"to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and mind your own business ... so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders."* (1 Thes. 4:11-12)

Further discussion on listening to the Holy Spirit's leading in your interactions with people is included at the end of this document.

## **GETTING STARTED**

This guide contains information to help you put together your story, what some call your "testimony." When you tell your story, it's God who is responsible for changing people's hearts. You are simply called to be ready to sincerely share your personal story of what God has done in your life. Other will give you a certain amount of respect as you express your own personal experience.

Included here are questions that will help you get started in writing out your testimony. This will give you a basis from which to write sentences and paragraphs about your own experience. Several examples of personal testimonies are included at the end of this guide, that might be useful to show you what your own testimony could look like.

It should sound like you are having a conversation, so use informal language. Share what happened to you, rather than preaching about what should happen to them.

When you have a draft, share your testimony with others to get their feedback. Then practice it out loud several times until you feel comfortable with it.

Once you have a testimony prepared, you can be ready for the next open-door God gives you to tell your own story testimony of the changes in your life since you made a decision to follow Jesus.

You will find that having a prepared testimony can be useful in various situations. You can share it when you introduce yourself to other believers individually or in church gatherings as an encouragement of God's goodness and faithfulness. You can also use it in everyday conversations at work or at school to share who you are and why you act the way you do. It can become an opening to allow them to express their own search for meaning and for truth in their lives.

A testimony is typically 3 to 6 minutes in length, but it can be as brief and 15 seconds or as long as 30 minutes depending on the setting and the purpose. Having it written down is to help you to prepare, think it through and get feedback from others. That provides you with something to refer to. Do not feel compelled to memorize it or read from it as you are speaking.

While it is important that you be prepared, you should also be willing to follow the Spirit's leading as you are speaking. For whatever reason, God wants us to both be prepared, and willing to be spontaneous, so that He is always in charge of the ministry and you are not doing it under your own strength.

# Preparing Your Testimony

The goal of your testimony is to describe the beneficial changes in your life as a result of finding peace with God and living under His guidance and care.

Your 'Life' testimony will have 3 basic parts:

1. Life before knowing Jesus
2. Coming to know Jesus
3. Life now with Jesus

## 1. My Life Before Knowing Jesus

Describe your life before Jesus. Start by using a simple introduction, such as "There was a time in my life when . . ."

What will others relate to most about your life before Jesus? Mention how you were raised and your family life. Describe what your life was like before you were saved.

- Try to describe your feelings.
- What did your life revolve around?
- Where did you get your security, identity or happiness from?
- What issues and things were important to you?
- How did you react when things didn't go as you planned?

Each person is searching for something to satisfy their deep inner needs. That creates a void in their life. What were the greatest unsatisfied needs you were searching prior to coming to Jesus?

lack of peace	loneliness	desire to be in control
lack of purpose	something missing	anger
lack of significance	nothing satisfies	lack of security
no meaning to life	no motivation	fear

How did your attempts to satisfy those deep inner needs begin to let you down? List positive as well as negative solutions you may have tried. For example:

marriage/family	entertainment / hobbies	wrong friends
work	sports / fitness	sex
money	good works to balance failures	alcohol / drugs
education		

## 2. How I Came to Know Jesus

Describe this turning point in your life. Include any details and feelings that are important to you.

Describe the circumstances that caused you to consider Jesus as the solution to your deep inner needs. Identify the events that led to your conversion over time.

- Before you were saved, what did you think of God? Who did you think Jesus was?

- When was the first time you heard the gospel? What were your initial reactions?
- When and why did your perspective of Jesus begin to change?
- What were the final struggles that went through your mind before you accepted Him and gave Him complete control of your life?
- If there is a particular passage of Scripture that applies here, you may want to paraphrase it.

In your own words, include the gospel clearly and briefly:

- All have sinned. I am a sinner.
- Sin has a cost. I was separated from God.
- Jesus paid the penalty. He took my punishment on Himself
- Jesus is the only way to God. I did nothing to earn my salvation, other than believe. I had to humble myself. I repented, and am now depending on Jesus.

### **3. My Life Now with Jesus**

Briefly talk about the difference that Jesus has made in your life since you turned to Him (were saved). How are you different now than you were before? How is your life different now?

How is Jesus filling your deep inner needs?

What has changed for you?

- Feelings? Attitudes? Habits? Character? Perspective on life?
- What motivates you now? What do you live for?

Have any conflicts in your life been resolved? Have any sinful habits, tendencies or struggles been overcome as a result of the changes He is making in you?

How does knowing Jesus help you deal with problems in your life?

How has knowing without a doubt that you are forgiven and going to heaven changed the stresses in your life?

Did you experience a new power over sin and temptation and a new vision of life?

Make it clear that there is power in Jesus. He has given you the power to say no to temptation and to enjoy God's role in your life.

If there is a particular passage of Scripture that applies here, you may want to paraphrase it.

Is there one event or moment that was particularly meaningful to you that you would like to share?

The person you talk to will tend to comment on the last thing you say. Depending on how a person has been responding, you may want to conclude with a statement that causes the person to reflect on what you have just shared. You can ask them if anything like this ever happened to them? Is something that they want in their life? Do they know for certain whether they have eternal life?"

# Tips for Telling Your Story

## HOW TO SHARE YOUR TESTIMONY

One of the most effective tools you have for sharing your faith is the story of a changed life, 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.*” (1 John 1:3)

### **Before you begin: Pray**

Pray before you write out your story and each time you share it. Ask God for wisdom and the words to share. Take time to talk with the Lord about writing out or speaking your testimony. Each opportunity is a witnessing tool that God can use to touch the life of an unsaved person who will be hearing or reading your testimony. Allow Him to guide your words.

## THINGS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR PRESENTATION

### **Explain the Problem – Sin**

Tell your readers or listeners what brought you to the realization of your need of a Savior. You don't need to give a laundry list of your sins, but you should tell how you were brought to conviction. The Bible tells us that God's law is what brings us to a knowledge of our need of salvation (Galatians 3:24). Your audience needs to know that the reason they should consider Jesus Christ is not because He can make them happy, but because they are sinners and He can forgive them. Focus your testimony on pointing people to Jesus.

### **Avoid Church Words**

In sharing your testimony, be careful about using words that your listeners aren't familiar with. People outside the church don't understand all of our vocabulary such as: Justification, Born Again, Repentance, the Blood of Jesus, In the Law, Sanctified, Delivered, Salvation, and Adoption. The more you can give your message using common words, the clearer your communication will be.

### **Be Honest and Real**

Share your testimony in an honest way. There is no reason to sensationalize the events in your life. There will be people in the audience who can relate to your real story, even if it sounds boring compared to someone else's testimony. When you are honest God can use your words to reach others.

### **Give Specific Examples**

Give your readers and listeners specific examples of how God worked in your life. The more examples of real events you can give, the more the audience will relate to the real ways God has changed you.

### **Share your Current Situation**

What is God doing in your life today? It is great to hear what He did last year (or 30 years ago) in saving you, but your audience will want to know that God is still at work in your life today.

## DEALING WITH BEING NERVOUS

### **Not in Your Own Strength**

God's Spirit lives inside you from the moment you first trusted Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit gives you the power to be His witness (Acts 1:8). Just be honest about who Jesus Christ is and what He's done in your life.

### **Everyone's on a Spiritual Journey**

God is already at work in the lives of others. Don't let assumptions keep you from asking others about their spiritual journeys and sharing your story of how God has met yours.

### **God Desires to Use YOU**

The Lord can use your story to help others come to know Jesus.

### **Don't Force the Issue**

Listen for the Spirit's leading. You are not called to run forward in the flesh beyond what the Spirit is leading you to do. You are merely expected to do what you see the Father doing. Recognize His leading for that specific moment and that specific person.

## **LEADING INTO YOUR TESTIMONY**

### **Pray**

Ask God to bring someone to mind — a friend, a family member or an acquaintance — who doesn't have a relationship with God yet. Then pray for God to draw that person to Himself.

Ask God to help you see and take the opportunities He provides to share your story. He might give you that chance in the midst of everyday conversations, or you could set up a time to talk.

Who has God brought to mind for you to share your story with?

### **How?**

When you feel comfortable giving your testimony, you may begin to wonder, "When do I share it with a non-Christian?" "How do I direct the conversation so it will lead to presenting my testimony?" You may find the following suggestions helpful.

#### **"Small Talk"**

Before discussing spiritual matters, discuss family, job, hobbies, interests, etc.

#### **Discuss past concerns and needs in your life**

"We used to struggle in our marriage relationship," or, "I used to allow the pressures at work to get to me." "Then I discovered something that made a tremendous difference in my life."

#### **Build relationships with them**

It may take ten minutes or ten hours or ten days or ten months—but build relationships.

### **Listen**

Be alert for expressed needs such as family problems or stress on the job. You can use these to show how Jesus has helped you through some of the same areas.

Sharing your story is not meant to be a one-way conversation. It's a chance to show that you care by listening and taking an interest in the other person's story.

Asking questions is one great way to do this. Try these:

- What is your religious background?
- What have you tried on your spiritual journey since then?
- Where are you now on your spiritual journey?
- Where do you want to be on your spiritual journey?

**Ask Permission**

Before you begin to share your story, ask permission. You might say, "Can I tell you a little bit about my spiritual experience?"

**Be Positive**

What you are sharing is Good News. Share it with loving enthusiasm in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let people see the story of what God is presently doing for and through you, recreating your story from what you saw, felt and learned.

**Avoid being critical**

Don't speak critically or negatively about any other individual or group.

**Avoid arguments on moral issues**

Don't preach or talk down to people. You can expect non-Christians to have conflicts with clear biblical teaching. Remember they do not have a valid base from which to make correct moral decisions. Don't condemn them for living like non-Christians, they are non-Christians. Your objective is to share how they can have a better life in Jesus.

**Avoid dogmatic "religious" statements**

Jesus is the answer to all their problems, but they don't even know who He is, much less what He can do in their lives.

**Leave the Results to God**

Share your story in the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the results to God. No matter how someone responds, continue to pray for them. You never know how the Lord will move in someone's life down the road.

**Remember**

Sharing your story isn't about accomplishing a task; it's about loving the person you are talking to — someone God loves (Ephesians 2:4-5) and wants to be in a relationship with.

**Finishing**

When you have shared your personal testimony, you may want to conclude with a statement that causes the person to reflect on what you have just shared. What you say will depend on how this person has been responding to what you have shared. If their response seems positive you could say something like:

1. "Has anything like this ever happened to you?"
2. "Do you ever think about what happens after this life?"
3. "Do you know for certain whether you are going to heaven / have eternal life?"
4. "Would you like to talk some more about these things sometime?"

## Credits

The information in this guide is based on the work of many ministries, which is available in greater detail online at the links provided below.

My work in preparing this guide was to compile and elaborate on the work of others to create a tool for the furtherance of the gospel.

You can reach me at Salt & Light with Maurice Hamel, [www.healingtheland.org](http://www.healingtheland.org)

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## Local Contact Information



## **Examples of Testimonies**

### **Example - I Grew Up Christian**

I grew up in a Christian family, so I was surrounded by God and the church from the very beginning. I was raised in a Christian home, but just followed through the motions of doing “Christian things” that I thought you were supposed to do. I didn’t know Him, I just knew about Him.

I found myself searching for purpose and meaning in people and also in myself. Whether that was my friends or in relationships, I poured my whole heart into them. I also became very fixated on myself and my image. I became very consumed with what people thought of me and was living for the acceptance of the world.

At my lowest point when I was alone and afraid, God drew me to Himself. From growing up in a Christian home, I knew what to do. I knew that He could save me if I just let Him. I confessed that I am a sinner and that I was trying to find life in other people and myself. I acknowledged that He sent Jesus to die on the cross so that I can be saved from my sin and have eternal life. I committed to living for God instead of others.

Since knowing Him, God showed me that being a “Christian” isn’t about just doing good works. He made it clear that I do not have to earn my salvation or His love (Eph. 2:8-9). He has given me fulfillment and purpose and joy. I am not perfect and I still mess up, but God loves me despite my flaws and imperfections. And when the things I was pursuing before continually let me down, God has never once left me. He has shown Himself to me in His Word, the Bible, in (insert your own verse of scripture). God loved me even at my lowest point and He rescued me from myself and eternal separation from Him.

### **Laura’s Testimony – Tried Living on My Own Terms**

I grew up in a solid evangelical church that focused on the soon return of Christ and tended toward fire and brimstone preaching. I was first baptized at 11, the age when all the kids in the church were being baptized. I went to a Christian summer camp each year in my teens. Only the Lord knows whether I was saved as a teen. By the end of high school, I had become very rebellious and made many mistakes throughout my teens and twenties, consistent with the culture of the late 1960s and 1970s.

I had spent years moving from one low paying job to another, but excelled in the arts, studying ballet and leading a folk-dance troupe. In 1981, by the time I was 29, I had broken off my engagement and was starting to become more sensitive spiritually. Seeing that I was tired of trying to live life on my terms, I started actively searching for God. I got a job in a Christian book store and spent my breaks reading Scripture. I quickly found that it was nourishing and could not get enough. I reached out to an old Sunday school teacher, who helped me get planted in a church where I could get fed and disciplined.

At the same time, I met my husband at an arts event where I was working. He was not yet saved but was seeking and so we began seeing each other regularly and attending church together.

In the late 1980s, I came down with fibromyalgia, a condition that causes both fatigue and muscle pain. That was followed by a string of other chronic illnesses. These have caused me to be sympathetic to the infirm and to be skilled at researching natural medical treatments. I also love to talk about the Lord’s soon return. Something about being chronically ill makes a person long for the promised “blessed hope,” and that is a good thing.

## **Maurice's Testimony – I Was a Good Person**

I grew up in a comfortable suburban neighborhood and attended the church as a child, but after high school did not continue to attend because “God was not there.”

I was a good student, but tended to escape using alcohol and pot. I considered myself to be a good person, at least more responsible than the guys I was hanging around with. But my conscience was telling me I was heading in the wrong direction. I was searching for something bigger than myself and ended up in the New Age movement.

When I met my wife, she was also searching, but was a new-born Christian and was able to challenge me to question the way I was thinking and living. She brought me to an Easter Sunrise Service where an altar call was given and the message was talking right to me. He said that even being a good person is not good enough to satisfy God and he very briefly summarized the gospel. Then after the service I spoke with him and gave my life to Christ. Apparently afterward the preacher was informed by those running the Christian camp that they do not do altar calls here. But God ceased the opportunity of having me be in an outdoor church service where I was comfortable and was able to hear Him speak. That was 1982.

My wife described me as “having potential, but needing a lot of work.”

Over the past 38 years, where before I was cynical, my attitude changed to looking for ways to encourage. I also have grown in the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control.

## **Hannah's Testimony – Growing up as a Sunday Christian**

Since the age of 4 or 5 I grew up in a Christian family, and went to church on Sundays. I always considered myself a Christian, or liked the idea of being one anyway, but I never actually made a decision for myself to follow Jesus until I was 20. I'd left home and was at a point in my life where I could no longer rely on my parents' faith to sustain me. I could no longer be a “Sunday Christian”. I decided if I was going to be a Christian I needed to do it for myself. I'd been baptised when I was 16 along with most of my family, but looking back I think I did it mainly because everyone else was doing it. When I was 22 I felt God telling me to get baptised again. And I did. I think this was a turning point in my life when I realised that what God says trumps what other people say.

## **Cyril - A Spiritual Journey to Fill a Void**

I was searching for truth, the meaning of life. There's something missing in my life. I didn't know what it was. It vacillated at that time in my life, in my late teens. Dabbling in existentialism, which says there's no God. Also got drawn into eastern religion and philosophy, Zen, Taoism, Buddhism, even shaved my head back then, got into the Timothy Leary thing of taking hallucinogenics to find the truth. I was Jewish, but had strayed far away from the path of God that I learned as a boy.

The whole nirvana thing with New Age – it was kind of a mash up until my senior year of college when I took a course on Jewish mysticism. There I'm realizing that there are Jews who want to know God. That got me looking into my Jewish roots. I decided becoming an orthodox Jew could be the answer. As I tried to be holy, to be quote 'a good Jew', at the same time I'm out of control. I'm living with a girlfriend. I'm addicted to porn. I'm not living a holy life. But outwardly here I am wearing tassels and eating kosher. Spiritually I was not satisfied. Yom Kipper every year, we're supposed to fast and pray for our sins. I did that every year. I never left the synagogue any better than I came in, and I kept wondering, 'There must be something missing.'

My personal quest to find God took me to some strange places. God spoke to me on one of his trips to the desert. In His mercy, He showed me a vision of a roadway to heaven in the clouds. Next to it I saw another vision in a cloud of a man lying down. He looked like He was dead, lying on His back, and He had a crown of thorns around His head. I wondered, 'Who's that and what does He have to do with the other vision?' Then I realized it was Jesus and wanted to learn more about Him.

I picked up a New Testament, the Jerusalem version. I figured if it said Jerusalem it was okay. I started reading the New Testament. The more I read about Jesus the more I was drawn to Him actually. Later, I met a woman who was reading a Bible. He recalls, "It had the Old and the New Testament in it. I didn't know that Christians read the Old Testament. She had a genuine faith in the God of Israel as a gentile. That intrigued me.

Then one night, I saw another vision. This being appears in my dream in glory like I've never seen before in my life. I'm not looking at this with my eyes. I'm in a dream, but this is real. I don't know how else to explain it, but I thought I was going to die in the presence of this being with eyes so bright that they were brighter than the sun. In His hand was an old looking parchment, and it had all this writing on it and I couldn't read it. It was too small. But I knew in my spirit that it was my whole life up to that point. In the bottom in big bold letter it said, 'IT'S TIME TO COME HOME.'

Soon after that vision, I began reading more about the Jewish Jesus. I picked up *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell. There, all of a sudden, I'm seeing the prophecies of who the Messiah of Israel is and how they were fulfilled in Jesus. I'm reading this just wondering, 'My God, why didn't I see this before? Why didn't anyone ever tell me this?'

I prayed to receive Jesus as his Lord and Savior. It was like a brick house lifted off me, a dark, heavy stickiness. This is what I've been looking for. I knew that all my sins had been forgiven, that I was right with God now.

I met other Christians and really got discipled. I met other Jews who believed in Jesus. I thought I was the only one when it happened to me. It was really exciting to meet others.

Jesus said that He's the Way, the Truth and the Life. Nobody comes to the Father but through Him. So for me it's a homecoming as a Jew. This is where Jews belong. I have a peace I never had before. The restlessness I had is gone. I know where I'm going. I know I'm right with God, thanks to the Lord Jesus.

God can change your life too.

## **Greg – It Used to Be All About Me**

By most people's standards, I was a successful man. I had a booming photography business, a beautiful family and was a talented musician. But one day, out of the blue, my life changed...

My hands started to go numb. I'm a finger-style guitar player so I pick out the individual notes with a certain finger. I started to notice a little bit in my hands as I was playing. We didn't worry too much about all this until I began experiencing double vision. Being a photographer obviously I depended on my eyes, and I saw everything going away -- the business and the ability to work.

The doctor said I had Multiple Sclerosis. That was just devastating news. I'm a musician, and I'd already started to lose the ability to play. Now he's telling me I was going to lose the ability to walk.

I didn't know which way to turn. Then one day I got a phone call from a total stranger. The phone rang, and this gentleman was on the phone. He said, 'I'm not really sure why I called but, you know, I just felt like I was supposed to.'

I felt comfortable with him for some strange reason. I told him about the diagnosis of MS. He said, 'Now I know why I've called.' He gave me scriptures on healing. He sent me a tape that he had done.

I was on my way to Montgomery, Alabama, to a shoot, and so I took those tapes with me to listen and try to get my thoughts together. As he drove and listened to the tapes, I realized that I couldn't do this by myself. So driving down I-85 I asked the Lord into my life. It was amazing the instant change that I felt. Nothing changed physically at all, but I just felt a release of the weight that was on me. My heart had changed.

I am grateful to God for the joy I have found in following Christ. The old Greg was to impress as many people as I could, to make you think that I'm somebody. It was indeed an 'all about me' person. The Lord changed all that to where it's not about me at all. It's all about Him.

## **Michelle's Story - I No Longer Want to Die**

During the end of 2006 and the early part of 2007, I was suffering from a terrible depression that led me to start thinking about suicide. Around that time I was talking to some people on a few forums about my problems. One of those people helped me learn a little bit about Jesus. I also found out about prayer on the internet, which led me to read about Jesus. Eventually, I began to realize that even the person who had helped me learn some about Jesus, couldn't help me. It seemed like the only one who could help me was the Lord himself.

I felt like I couldn't trust people, so I turned to the Lord.

Now I'm doing a lot better and I'm no longer suicidal. I trust people more and the Lord has changed me so much! Thanks to Jesus, I no longer want to die! If it wasn't for him I do not think I would have made it. That's not all he's done though; He has saved me so I could have everlasting life!

*John 3:16-17 - For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

## **Brendan's Testimony - God Really Is Real**

I am giving this testimony because I am totally astounded at what God has done in my life! I was so fed up with life, but it just didn't occur to me that God could be real - or if he was, why he would want anything to do with someone like me.

About this time last year, I was stuck on a seemingly endless treadmill of working, getting stoned, and sleeping. This had been going on for years. I was aware that drugs had taken over my life. I had grown dissatisfied. I no longer enjoyed life as I once had. The crunch came when I lost yet another job because of my drug-induced laziness. This time I was really angry at myself! I couldn't understand why my life was like this and other people's lives were not.

In a rare moment of self-admitted weakness, I broke, and asked God, "Oh, show me if you're real!" Unbelievably, I found an Alpha course leaflet posted through the letterbox by a complete stranger. I phoned the number and haven't looked back since. Through the Alpha course, I found out that God really is real, Jesus really is real, and the Holy Spirit is alive and well and living everywhere! Oh, and did I mention that prayer actually works, if done properly!

## **Sara's Testimony - How I Got My Hope Back**

For eleven years I was harassed on a daily basis. I feared to go to school. It left marks on me — mostly on my soul — but one on my arm stands out as a sign of what can happen when you go too far. I burned a cross into my arm hoping it would help ease my pain.

My life wasn't always that bad. My father would come down every summer to spend a week with us. That stopped in grade six and I never saw him again. The last time he called I yelled at him and said I never wanted to speak to him again. Man, I was stupid. My life got worse after that. I would pray to God every night to let me die. I even planned my death many times.

I took overdoses of my medicine. I even ran out into the street once. But something happened to me that gave me my hope back — God. Through him, I found hope in my life once more.

It started on a bad day. I don't really remember what went on that day. I do know that I had taken a knife with me to school to use in self-defense. I planned to hurt the girl that had bullied me all my life. But I never brought the knife out. Later on that night, I lay in bed awake with my eyes closed. Before long I found myself in a field and a man walked up to me. He said, "Sara, what you're planning to do — don't. God loves you and is always there for you." When I woke up I found myself sitting up, huddled in a corner.

Now I tell others about my battle and how God restored my hope. I have even made plans to become a teacher.

## **Dawn's Testimony - God Kept Me**

I was raised in church all my young life, mostly by choice. My step-father was sexually abusive and my mother was never home. I remember going to church as young as six years old, just to get away from home, if only for a little while. God was intervening for me. I could have been out getting into trouble or worse -- but God kept me.

As a young adult, at 15 years of age, I began doing drugs, alcohol and became pregnant. Three kids and five marriages later, after being beaten, in and out of rehab centers, and three serious car wrecks that should have claimed my life -- God kept me.

I am so grateful to God and Jesus, my Lord, for saving me and giving me another chance at a good life with my kids. As of now, I have been involved in church almost two years. My children are thriving in God's house and in His Word. I've noticed my children tend to think of others first. They talk to their friends about what God can do for them. I am so fortunate to have such wonderful children, especially after all they have been through.

We are very active in our youth group. I am involved with the Jail Ministry, Women's Ministry, Nursing Home Ministry and the Food Bank. We try to be active in everything that concerns spreading God's Word.

My only regret is that I wasted so much time on the Devil. Yet, my life is proof that no matter what you have done, who you are, or where you've been, God will forgive you and provide for you. God kept me.

## The Importance of Being Led by The Spirit

There is a teaching that is fairly common that says “the only thing we can take with us to heaven are the souls of people that are waiting for us to tell them about Jesus.” Certainly it is very important. However, while well intentioned as a motivator to evangelize, it is not a true statement. Jesus said that great is your reward for even offering a cup of cool water to the least of these. The important thing is to let God work through you as you are being yourself. This is what Peter was saying when he instructed wives to let your quiet behavior win over your unbelieving husbands. (1 Pet. 3:1) All those things play a part in the command to “*Go make disciples.*” (Matt. 28:19)

When I was a new Christian, like many others, I was prone to putting God to the test. I would put His word out there with the expectation that He had promised it would bear fruit. But I did not yet know that this needed to be balanced with what the Holy Spirit was doing in their lives. “*No one can come to me, unless the Father first draws them.*” (John 6:44) So, running ahead of what God is doing in their lives can actually make the gospel less attractive to them if they feel they are being judged and pushed. The key to this balance is the need for the Spirit to have been drawing them by preparing their hearts and that you are listening for the Spirit’s timing. Of course, all of this needs to have had a foundation of prayer, thanksgiving, and worship.

Often when I see an opportunity to share the gospel with someone, I hear the Spirit say “Not now. Just pray and love them. They are not yet ready,” indicating my role was to let them see Jesus through me. This is what Jesus was referring to when he said “*Others have done the hard work*” in (John 4:38) as he told his disciples to go reap the harvest of the crowd of Samaritans who followed the woman at the well back to see Jesus.

Your “hard work” is helping to prepare the hearts of people to be ready to hear the message by letting them see the love of Jesus reflected in your life. Maybe you could be the one who says to them “*come and see ... could this be the Messiah?*” (John 4:29) That was her testimony. You also have a testimony that you can share. Just remember, Jesus said the hard work must be done before the workers can do the harvest.

There is no need to feel pressured that you have been given that task if the Holy Spirit is not giving you the words to say. It is God who is responsible for changing people’s hearts. Their eternal destiny does not rest in your hands. You are simply called to be ready and to share God’s goodness to you in your life.

While we should not under-estimate the importance of our witnessing to others, we should not have puffed-up ideas of our own role. John DeVries tells an insightful story to explain that our efforts can be compared to a six-year-old sitting on his grandfather’s lap “helping” him drive the tractor. The little one is convinced that his grandfather would have trouble running the farm without his help. Like a loving father, God is pleased to have you, His child, participate in what He is doing as you sit on His lap. Your small hands rest on His large hands, as He controls the tractor.

One example of how this can be applied to our daily lives is that too often we fear that the Great Commission sits squarely on our shoulders, personally. There have been times when I let myself feel unnecessarily pressured, as though the eternal fate of some family member, friend, or co-worker is in my hands. The stress of such anticipation, or in hindsight, such guilt, can be a heavy burden that we carry, which is not from God. His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

In those moments, it would be helpful to remember the image of this child “helping” his grandfather with driving the tractor that is working to get the field ready for the harvest of lost souls. God is not worried that you will fail in your mission and a soul will be eternally lost because you did not “take advantage of an opportunity.” He knows you better than you know yourself.

There is much said about waiting to feel “led” regarding witnessing to others. There are those who will say that you should wait for the Spirit’s leading, rather than run ahead of what God is doing. There are others that will say it is disobedience to the Great Commission to not seize every opportunity and that God’s word will not come back void. (Is. 55:11)

However, that promise also includes the statement “*but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*” If you have not taken the time to listen to the Spirit’s leading, you do not know what God desires to achieve in your specific encounter with a person. Doing anything more is actually just putting God to the test, which was one of the temptations that even Jesus faced in the wilderness. Satan quoted the scripture that “*He will command his angels ... so that you will not strike your foot against a stone*” (Matt. 4:6) and then challenged Jesus to jump off the highest point of the temple because God had promised to protect him. Jesus recognized this particular promise was being taken out of context. Jesus later said that “*he can only do what he sees the Father doing.*” (John 5:19) In our context, this means following the Spirit’s leading for each particular situation as they occur. If they are not yet ready to hear it, trying to force-feed biblical truth to someone, telling them to repent of their sins, with the expectation that God promised it would bear fruit, is not necessarily an appropriate use of that promise.

If the Spirit is telling you “Not now,” don’t feel that you have missed an opportunity. Remember, if God plans to use you to help in His bringing someone to salvation, even if you resist him, God is more than able to supply the whale to swallow you and deliver you to the right place at the right time to preach to your Nineveh. He is also more than able to have someone else complete the task, once you have had the opportunity to do it.

God has the situation covered. Your efforts will not and cannot foil the plans of God, they only determine the extent of your rewards. So do your best to relax and listen to the Spirit’s “leading.”

*“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have within you. But do this with gentleness and respect.”* (1 Peter 3:15)

At the same time, balance that with Jesus’ instruction:

*“Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”* (Matt. 10:19-20)



# Personal Testimony Work Sheet

This work sheet provides you with a place to write down your thoughts as you go through the various sections of this guide. Your Personal Testimony will have three basic parts: *Life Before Knowing Jesus*; *How You Came to Know Jesus*; and *Life Now with Jesus*.

1. Life Before Knowing Jesus: Write a few thoughts about how you were raised and your family life.

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Using the section on your inner needs and how you had previously tried to satisfy them, write down a few words that describe your feelings.

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2. How You Came to Know Jesus: Describe this turning point in your life. Include any details and feelings that are important to you.

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3. Life Now with Jesus: Write a few thoughts about what has changed for you since you were saved? Feelings? Attitudes? Habits?

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Write about one event or moment that was particularly meaningful to you that you would like to share. For example, how has being saved affected significant events in your life since you have come to know Jesus?

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Put all these pieces together to tell your story.

\_\_\_\_\_’s Personal Testimony  
[your name]

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Practice sharing your wonderful testimony with your friends, family, and small group to get advice and to become comfortable with it. You are now equipped to share what Jesus has done in your life.

***"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have within you. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15)***