

Lesson 7: Our Personal Testimony

Introduction When we talk with people about faith, it doesn't only have to do with passing on biblical knowledge. They need to see that the gospel has changed our lives. It was the same way in Jesus' life and ministry. In the gospel of John we read: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:14) It doesn't say, "And the Word became a book." Jesus didn't just want to convey the right facts about God. He could have done that from heaven. But Jesus became a human being and lived among people. They saw in His life that He practiced what He preached.

And that is exactly what people should see in our lives. John wrote in his first epistle, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:1-3)

Nothing is more important for the conversion of other people than the testimony of what God has done in our personal lives. People want to experience the gospel not only from the Bible, but also from our personal lives. They want to see in our lives that we really believe what we are telling them. When we talk about personal testimony, we need to remember that the silent testimony we live out in our lives is more important. The words we share about how we got to know Jesus and what He means to us only make sense when they are underscored by our lives.

Quote #1 "As witnesses for Christ, we are to tell what we know, what we ourselves have seen and heard and felt. If we have been following Jesus step by step, we shall have something right to the point to tell concerning the way in which He has led us. We can tell how we have tested His promise, and found the promise true. We can bear witness to what we have known of the grace of Christ. This is the witness for which our Lord calls, and for want of which the world is perishing." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 340)

Quote #2 "Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven's chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. ... But that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 347)

Quote #3 "The apostle Paul says that God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son." Colossians 1:13. And everyone who has passed from death unto life is able to "set to his seal that God is true." John 3:33. He can testify, "I needed help, and I found it in Jesus. Every want was supplied, the hunger of my soul was satisfied; and now the Bible is to me the revelation of Jesus Christ. Do you ask why I believe in Jesus? Because He is to me a divine Saviour. Why do I believe the Bible? Because I have found it to be the voice of God to my soul." We may have the witness in ourselves that the Bible is true, that Christ is the Son of God. We know that we are not following cunningly devised fables." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 112)

Testimony is Unique Just as God created each person uniquely, He has also led each one in a unique way. Always keep this in mind. Only you can tell your testimony. If you don't share your testimony then you are stealing a unique opportunity from God to reveal Himself to people in your sphere of influence.

2 Types of Testimony What exactly can we share when we profess our faith? There are basically 2 kinds of testimony. The first is the testimony of our conversion; the second is the testimony of our daily experiences with God.

Some may think that they don't have an impressive conversion story, because they grew up in the church and have always wanted to live with Jesus. But it isn't necessary to be able to tell a dramatic conversion story. It is awe-inspiring when someone explains how God freed them from the chains of sin. But God's power and goodness shines much clearer when you can share how God saved you from a hurtful life of sin. Thank God for blessing and protecting you as you grew up and that you could already love and trust Him as a child. We don't have to have lived in the gutter in order to give an impressive testimony for Jesus. Read what Ellen White says about such conversions!

Quote #5 "Conversions are not all alike. Jesus impresses the heart, and the sinner is born again to new life. Often souls have been drawn to Christ when there was no violent conviction, no soul rending, no remorseful terrors. They looked upon an uplifted Saviour; they lived. They saw the soul's need; they saw the Saviour's sufficiency and His claims; they heard His voice saying, "Follow Me," and they rose up and followed Him. This conversion was genuine, and the religious life was just as decided as was that of others who suffered all the agony of a violent process." (*Evangelism, p. 287*)



Please write down the significance of this statement in your own words!

The second kind of testimony involves sharing our daily experiences with God. We can tell about the large and small experiences God has given us and how we His goodness again and again. We can explain how He has guided us through difficult situations and how it was a blessing even though we would have never chosen this experience ourselves. This kind of testimony is very valuable because it makes it clear that we are living with Jesus today. And furthermore, this was the only testimony that Jesus could give because He never had to be converted.

What belongs in a Personal Testimony? Let's take a look at the first type of testimony! When we tell others how we got to know Jesus we need to include three things:

1. How was my life before I met Christ?
2. How did I become a Christian?
3. What is my life like today as a Christian?

Even someone who grew up in a protected Adventist family and never entertained thoughts of living a life without God or the church can say something here. For example: "I grew up in a Christian family and was acquainted with God and the Bible since I was small. My parents lived out their faith in daily life. But the time came when I had to make my own decision if I would make their beliefs my own." It is important to emphasize what your faith means to you today. My personal testimony goes as follows:

An Example

I grew up in an atheist family. God wasn't important during my childhood. But as a child I had a question for which there was no good answer. If there wasn't a God, "What happens when I die?" For me the thought of being alive was simply mind-blowing. I was amazed about the miracle of life. I was fascinated that I could think and feel. But the thought of someday not existing anymore for eternity was simply horrible for me. I felt so small. Just a short life in infinite time on a small planet in an endless universe! But atheism couldn't give me a better answer. Death was an unavoidable black hole for me.

When I was 18 years old something happened that changed my life drastically. A friend invited me to a Christian youth meeting. I was curious and open. I experienced something there, which I had never been acquainted with before. The young people had such hearty fellowship with each other that it attracted me. Up until this point Christianity hadn't been an option for me. I even had reasons against God's existence down pat. Faith was something for old people and small children, but not for me. But suddenly I saw intelligent, likeable youth, who took their faith seriously and really lived out their faith. That made me curious. I began to read the Bible and it captivated my interest. Especially the biblical prophecies for the future fascinated me. In the Bible there are very specific statements about the future, which were made hundreds of years before they were fulfilled and can be verified. It became clear to me that no human could have had such knowledge about the future. There must be a God that was behind this.

I started to pray and experienced those prayers being answered. Then I began to study the Bible. I found answers that helped me grow. I also found an answer to what happens when a person dies. Fascinating answers! Before long I couldn't imagine any other way of life than as a Christian. I can't exactly say when I was converted. There was no spectacular experience that I could note in my calendar. Rather it was a slow process. But I know that times came when I had to decide if my path would continue with Jesus or not.

That was many years ago. There hasn't been a single day in which I have regretted my decision. God has blessed me so much. Today I am happily married to a Christian woman. It is a privilege for us to train our children together to have faith in God. I have a peace in my heart, which I never knew before. There is a Bible verse that describes beautifully what I experienced with God. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) I experienced fear, but God gave me peace in my heart.

**Narrative
and not
report
format**

While reading you may have noticed that the testimony is written in a narrative format and not in a report format. The reason is simple. A testimony should be told freely and not read. Nevertheless, it is helpful to write your testimony down so that you have a guideline that you can refer to. The more often you share your testimony the easier

Where can I give my testimony?

After you have written your testimony down and engrained it in your mind, look for opportunities to share it with others. Keep your eyes open for people who are open. We don't want to force our testimony on someone who isn't ready. We also don't need to attempt to tensely turn every conversation into a dialogue about faith. Whoever does that will soon have the reputation of being someone you can't talk with about normal things. Live out your faith naturally! And ask God to open your eyes for people, who will appreciate your testimony. Then you will find opportunities to speak naturally about your experiences with Jesus.

Pointers for a good Testimony

When you share your testimony pay heed to the following points:

- A personal testimony is like a commercial, which should spark people's interest in Jesus in a very short time. So it doesn't have to do with putting ourselves in the spotlight, but rather Jesus.
- Keep your testimony fairly short (approx. 3-4 minutes). Observe closely how much the person is interested in what you have to say. If you notice that there isn't much interest, then keep your testimony very short. If they are listening carefully, then you can share more. But remember: better to use too few words than too many.
- Share your testimony naturally. Even if you wrote it down first, it may not sound as if you were doing it by memory.
- Be prepared to tell others humbly but bravely that you are a Christian.
- Be practical! Share what Jesus means to you today. Instead of just generally telling "how wonderful" it is to be a Christian, you should tell in detail what is actually wonderful about being a Christian.
- Identify with the person you are talking to! If possible, make a connection to things you have in common or questions that they might have while you are sharing.
- Don't glamorize your past sins by telling about them in detail. Share only what is needed to understand how Jesus changed your life. The focal point of your testimony should be what Jesus has done for you and is doing today.
- Avoid expressions and figures of speech in your testimony which non-Adventists or non-Christians would have a hard time understanding.
- Never criticize other churches or religious groups! In most cases it is better not to mention any Christian church by name – including the Adventist church. If it is necessary to mention a specific church then it should be done respectfully. Our testimony shouldn't be used as an advertisement for Seventh-day Adventists, but rather to show how beautiful a life with Jesus is.
- Avoid giving a long list of all the victims, who demanded you to make a decision for Christ. This could frighten off your friend.
- Be open and honest. It's not a problem to admit that we are still having difficulties.
- Be friendly and share your testimony with a bright smile. Let them feel that your faith is the most precious thing in the world to you.
- Pray that the Holy Ghost will work on their hearts while you share your testimony.
- Always be positive even when negative reactions to your testimony come. Try to go back to a point that your listener can agree with. End your conversation in a friendly and polite manner.

Your Challenge

Ask God for an opportunity to share with someone your experience with Jesus. You can be sure that God will use your personal testimony to draw other people to Him!

