
ICL Evangelism & Discipleship

CRAFTING YOUR GOSPEL STORY

ASSIGNMENT RESOURCES

“A Christian with a testimony is never at the mercy of an unbeliever with an argument.”
Adrian Rogers

I. SOME INTRODUCTORY SCRIPTURES

A. An Old Testament Challenge to Testify

Psalm 107:2

² Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble (NASB)

² Has the LORD redeemed you? Then speak out!
Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies. (NLT)

B. The Personal Testimony of the Man Born Blind, Healed by Jesus

John 9:25

“Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

C. The Personal Testimony of the Apostle Paul

1 Timothy 1:13-16

¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

D. Jesus’ Post-Resurrection Command to Be His Witness

Acts 1:7-8

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

E. A Reminder that the ‘Message of the Cross’ is Foolishness to Many

1 Corinthians 1:18, 23-24

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . [W]e preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

F. The Call to Godly Submission, Respect, and Winsomeness

Titus 2:9

⁹ Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, ¹⁰ and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

G. Illustration of a Humble, ‘I-Have-Not-Yet-Arrived’ Testimony

Philippians 3:12-14

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

H. Focusing on Christ and Leveraging Our Weaknesses for His Glory

2 Corinthians 4:5-7

⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. . . . ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

I. Image of the Christian Witness as Christ’s ‘Ambassador’

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

II. WHY PERSONAL TESTIMONIES CAN BE ESPECIALLY EFFECTIVE IN OUR DAY

- A. The general mood today is one of anti-authority, anti-hierarchy, and anti-imposition.
- B. Personal *stories* are acceptable, but the prevailing assumption is that there is not one *Story*.
- C. Personal experiences carry more connection than theories, abstractions, and principles.
- D. Preaching is out, sharing is in, and a testimony is mostly (though not completely) sharing.

III. ASSIGNMENT: STUDENT TESTIMONY / FOLLOW-UP Q&A

Each student will share a brief (10- to 12-minute) **gospel story (i.e., a personal testimony)** with the class. Build a gospel presentation around a “theme-hook” or motif pertaining to your own life story. (We will discuss theme-hooks and motifs in class.) Presentation notes are suggested but optional; nevertheless, you *must* submit on the day of your presentation a 1-page bulleted list of key points or movements you intend to share in your testimony.

Your testimony *must* include a **brief but clear presentation of how a person becomes a genuine Christian**. In addition to the “theme-hook,” you may approach your testimony from the standpoint of “how and why I became a Christ follower.” The goal is to help crystallize your thinking about your own journey to Christ, and to develop a practical tool that you can use to share your faith with others. *Do not exceed the time limit.*

After your presentation, the instructor will put you on “the hot seat,” spending another 3-4 minutes, asking you a question or two about your spiritual journey, perhaps even challenging some of your beliefs! The goal here is to give you practice in moving *graciously* from a testimony (a controllable monologue) to a conversation (an unpredictable dialogue), with its myriad twists, turns, opportunities, and apologetic implications. **Due: In class on Wednesday, October 28 or Wednesday, November 4 (schedule TBD).**

Evaluation Criteria:

Criteria	Descriptive Numerical Valuations			Score
Theme-Hook	Captivating 4.00	Thoughtful 3.40	Predictable 2.80	
Gospel Content	Very Clear 4.00	Adequate 3.40	Muddled 2.80	
Presentation	Engaging 4.00	Sufficient 3.40	Laborious 2.80	
Impact	Inspiring 4.00	Helpful 3.40	Insipid 2.80	
Follow-Up	Compelling 4.00	Responsive 3.40	Unresponsive 2.80	
TOTAL of 20				

A. What is a theme-hook?

Is there a prevailing theme (characteristic, struggle, challenge, distinctive) to your life? Is there a way for you to take that theme and make it a connection point to your listeners? Consider phrasing your theme-hook in the form of a question.

1. “Have you ever been abandoned by someone who was supposed to care about you? Did it leave you wondering if God himself might someday abandon you? Or did it leave you thinking that maybe he never really cared about you in the first place? I was abandoned by my parents on the very first day of my life. And that left me with many insecurities.”
2. “Do you have a need to control everything in your life? Your income, your career, your relationships, your health? There was a time when I needed to control every aspect of my life, and even the lives of others. But one day I discovered that I had lost control of everything. In fact, you could say that I was completely out of control.”

3. Considering using your theme as a vehicle carry your story or a motif to color it.

B. What is the gospel?

1. Remember that the gospel is an announcement or declaration of good news.
2. Remember that there is a distinction between the gospel and its implications.
3. Remember not to “assume” the gospel; instead, declare it plainly and persuasively.

IV. SOME SUGGESTED GUIDELINES

- A. Be truthful.
- B. Be humble and authentic.
- C. Be Christ-centered.
- D. Be clear about the gospel.
- E. Avoid exaggeration.
- F. Avoid denomination-bashing.
- G. Avoid being overly critical of others.
- H. Avoid religious jargon.
- I. Avoid super-spirituality.
- J. Avoid glorifying Satan.
- K. Avoid arguments and rabbit trails.
- L. Practice your testimony, and solicit peer feedback.

V. STRUCTURING YOUR TESTIMONY (ONE POSSIBILITY)

Galatians 1:11-24

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it [cf. Acts 7:59-8:3]. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother. ²⁰ I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. ²¹ Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” ²⁴ And they praised God because of me.

Testimonies can take many forms, but one simple structure you might want to consider—especially if you’re new at this—is the classic three-fold model:

A. Movement 1: Describe your life *before* your conversion (Gal 1:13-14).

1. What was your purpose in life?
2. What were your goals, passions, and aspirations?
3. How would you describe your worldview and lifestyle?
4. What pain, trauma, or disappointment did you wind up facing?
5. What did you think of God, Christ, the Bible, or the church?

B. Movement 2: Describe your life *at* your conversion (Gal 1:11-12, 15-16a).

1. How did God make himself known to you?
2. How did you finally respond to God’s “amazing grace” in Jesus?
3. Was it hard for you to believe and accept God’s love and forgiveness?
4. What kind of emotions, if any, did you experience when you surrendered to Christ?
5. If your salvation is more of a dawning awareness, describe your growing dedication.

C. Movement 3: Describe your life *since* your conversion (Gal 1:16b-24).

1. How did your understanding of God begin to change?
2. How did your attitude toward other people (and yourself) begin to change?
3. What changes did you begin to see in your purpose, worldview, and lifestyle?
4. Whom did you consult to better understand your newfound faith?
5. What kind of ministry did the Holy Spirit begin to place on your heart?

VI. THE POWER OF STORY IN OUR DAY

The uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ have always been stumbling blocks for people. The contemporary mind is no different in this regard. Yet contending for the supremacy of Christ in our day might be better served by story than by raw argument. Consider the following parable.

The traveler stood by the side of the road, weary and perplexed. Around him radiating in all different directions were innumerable paths, but mist cloaked the hillside, thick and impenetrable. The signpost had become so weather-beaten, that it had become illegible. “Which way should I go,” he asked himself. “I want to find the way to the fountain of truth, but there are so many roads to choose from. Which is the right one?”

As he pondered the problem, three other travelers came up behind him, journeying the same road by which he had arrived at the signpost. “Excuse me,” he said to the first. “Can you tell me the way to the fountain of truth?”

“Oh,” said the first traveler scornfully. “You don’t still believe in that rubbish called truth do you? These roads all lead nowhere. All that talk about the fountain of truth is so much mythological nonsense. If you take my advice, you’ll pitch your tent right here by the signpost and make the best of what you’ve got.”

The traveler's face fell at the skeptic's words, but brightened up a bit at the sight of the second man coming up the road behind him. "Excuse me," he said. "Can you tell me the way to the fountain of truth?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "Ah, who can say? Myself, I am an agnostic on the question. Maybe it's this road, maybe it's that road. You can't possibly *prove* which is the right one and which is the wrong one. The important thing is to be tolerant and open-minded. Feel free to choose whatever path you wish. I wouldn't dream of trying to impose my opinion on you and influence your decision in the matter."

The traveler thanked the agnostic for his advice, though privately he had hoped for more precise directions. Perhaps the third man would be more helpful, he thought. "Excuse me," he asked again. Can you tell me the way to the fountain of truth?

This time his fellow traveler smiled benignly. It is an unnecessary question, my friend. *All* roads lead there. They only *appear* to go in different directions. Out there in the mist, they circle back and converge on one another at your desired destination. Follow whichever path you wish; you will get there in the end. Everybody does."

The traveler frowned, unconvinced. His battered old map indicated the presence of cliffs in the area, down which an erring walker might easily fall if he took the wrong path. "So, which is the right one?" he thought. The traveler sighed with frustration.

Then suddenly, out of the mist, a fourth figure appeared. Unlike the others, this man did not come up the road the other travelers had been walking to arrive at the signpost. Instead, he came down one of the other trails, and a steep and seldom-traversed one at that.

"Excuse me," said the traveler once more. "Could you possibly help me? I am looking for the fountain of truth. One person has told me there is no such place. Another has told me to be open-minded on the question. And a third has told me that all roads lead there. Can *you* tell me the right way?"

"Indeed, I can," replied the stranger with gentle yet firm assurance. "I'm afraid those you spoke to were just *guessing*, for they have never *been* to the fountain of truth, and can only *speculate* about which road to take. I, on the other hand—I *live* there. In fact, I *am* the fountain truth.

"Come," he said with a smile. "Follow me." And as he held out his hand to lead the traveler on, he saw that there was a nail print in his palm.

Did he take the hand, or did he stay by the signpost?

Why *don't* people take that hand—the hand of Jesus? Is it because they actually *prefer* their indecision by the side of the road? After all, many prominent people have already refused that hand. What would they think if I myself were to take it? Might I be ostracized by those who settle for camping at the signpost? Might I be labeled as "a fanatic"?

Could it be that some are scared of the *commitment* associated with accepting that route? To resolutely choose one path is effectively to renounce all the others, and that could be viewed as being awfully narrow-minded.

Or could it be that some people *fear* this Jesus, with his big claims to sovereign truth? If I take his hand, won't it constrain my life in a straightjacket of misery and rob me of my freedoms? Won't it turn me into a crazy religious monster?

But don't we realize that Jesus represents *crucified* truth? Crucified truth coerces nobody. Crucified truth bullies nobody. Crucified truth tortures nobody. Crucified truth addresses itself to men and women in their freedom and in their need. Crucified truth respects the dignity of those at the signposts of life.

Crucified truth comes to men and women who are aware that they don't *know* the truth, but who are not so cynical as to not *believe* the truth when it holds out its nail-scarred hand to them in resurrection love.

VII. SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

A. A Personal Discipleship Benefit in Sharing Your Faith

Philemon 1:6

⁶I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

B. The 'Overcoming Power' of a Personal Testimony

Revelation 12:11

¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.

C. Sharing One's Life and Faith

It is fashionable these days for evangelicals to say things like this: "The traditional view has always been that Christians are to live their lives and share their faith. A better view is for Christians to live their faith and share their lives."

While there is a legitimate impulse to such a sentiment, this kind of binary thinking offers a false dichotomy that is corrected by numerous passages of Scripture explicitly calling believers to share the content of the gospel. In fact, the two are best shared **together:**

1 Thessalonians 2:8

⁸We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

So share your life. And share the gospel *as* you share your life. As David Platt says, "Every saved person this side of heaven owes the gospel to every lost person this side of hell."