

When a Christian is called upon to give his testimony in the church, it's important that he remember that the goal of all speaking, in the meetings of church, is to edify (1 Cor. 14:12). Our words should be chosen, not with the thought of merely expressing what is on our minds, nor as if people learning about us for its own sake were of any value – as though any of us were anything notable! Rather, what we say is best guided if we keep the building up of the church as the goal in our view.

Further, every opportunity to give your testimony is also an opening to bring the call of the gospel to bear on the heart and conscience of unbelievers who are present. We are urging lost sheep, who have not yet entered into the fold of the shepherd, to come to Him, as we came – through our Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly this means that the work of Christ in your life, rather than your own deeds (either prior to or since conversion), is what should be made prominent in what is said. In the example we have of the Apostle Paul presenting his testimony (1 Tim. 1) he emphatically declares that, in saving him, Jesus Christ demonstrated His glorious power in saving such a great sinner, and manifests His perfect patience with sinners so that all might be encouraged to come to Him. Displaying those same glorious attributes of our Lord should be our intent as well.

A little careful thought to apply these two goals to the presentation of our testimony, edifying the church and presenting the gospel to the lost, will serve as a helpful guide to us, especially when we only have a few minutes to present this testimony amid other parts of a worship service. When you only have a short time to speak, you want to emphasize certain things and, just as importantly, this means you must choose to exclude other things. Emphasis on the indispensable always means, what is not indispensable is left out, so that it not distract our hearers from that which is essential to their well-being. Permitting unwarranted time to speak of trivia about our lives can turn an otherwise potentially stirring and God-honouring testimony into an agonizing endurance test of people's patience, as we review insignificant details before our hearers, to their protracted boredom!

In light of this, I would propose that, as you plan to give your testimony in the church, keep these things in mind:

- § You are not giving a biography; you are zooming in on the story of God's salvation in your life
- § This means you don't want to tell everything you can recall, in sequence.
- § You want to select what really tells most about what God did.

In detail, that breaks down to these:

- § In telling about your pre-Christian life, focus mostly on what trends of thought and beliefs dominated your thinking. Resist the tendency to turn it into a running story about each and every significant event you can recall from your youth or formative years. Find a way to sum up who you were and where you were headed.
- § If you speak at all of what sorts of sins dominated your life, be discreet (remember that there are children present) and be careful not to betray confidences of others present or not present. There is no purpose served by lingering long on these matters, and some possible harm by doing so.
- § A good rule of thumb is, tell us of two incidents or events (at most) in your life history which illustrate the above.
- § Describe the kind of presentation of the gospel you heard, whether that was from a long-running influence in your life (such as godly parents) or a person who God sent at some point as a "witness" for the Lord. Explain briefly your initial response, and compare that with the change of heart and response that took place as God worked in you.

- § Describe some of the initial fruits of repentance and faith in your life, which demonstrated you were a new person in Christ. A couple of illustrative incidents of your great joy in knowing God and your new-born “first love” and zeal for the Lord are always inspiring and heart-warming for others to hear.

Now, as you think now about the suggestions made, pause a moment to consider that you may have one minute at most to tell your audience about *each of the above*! Your first reaction to that might be to say, “It can’t be done.” But it can be done, and very effectively, if you make careful preparation. The fact is, most testimonies which last longer than 10 minutes bore our hearers, because, first, most of us are not gifted speakers who can grip the attention of an audience for an extended period of time, and second, very few of us have such unique lives that, people hearing about us are hearing much that they haven’t all heard before!

All of this means keeping our testimony short is more than just useful for the sake of fitting it into the time of the worship service; it’s vital if we want to present a testimony that really impacts people’s lives!

An important step to accomplishing all of the above, without rambling on and on, will be to prepare your words by writing them all out, word-for-word. Such preparation and notes help most of us stay focused when we are speaking, and helps us to identify what to include and what to exclude. You don’t even have to read from it when you are delivering your testimony. Just making yourself do the preparation will help you focus on what you should say, and having it there with you, as a general guide to what you’re going to say, will do a lot to prevent aimless rambling.

Some of us have been trained to think that bringing notes of what to say to church is not as “spiritual” as just speaking whatever comes to mind while we’re standing up front. But I can assure you, there is nothing more intrinsically “spiritual” about what comes out of the mouth of the unprepared than what is said by those who have done forethought, planning, and even writing. The Holy Spirit is just as capable of guiding your written preparation as He is capable of guiding you on your feet. And as for us, we are far more susceptible to a host of our own disorderly thoughts, not His, when we do not prepare. Prepared notes, which are prepared to last only 5 to 7 minutes, will actually keep you from having to be conscious of the clock! For you’ll already know, from the moment you start, that everything you have prepared to say can be covered in the allotted time. That’s valuable, and keeps you from being distracted by the limitations on your time.

Let me add a few other closing suggestions:

- § Keep names and places clear; it’s easy to confuse your audience about people they don’t know, so work to stay clear about who and where you are talking about.
- § Emphasize what God did in your life – not what you did. After all, your testimony is about His salvation and His glory! He has made you a display-case of His power and grace; make sure that’s what you are displaying.
- § Think of ways to share all this which will make evident to all your hearers that what you want most is for them to know the love of Christ, the forgiveness of Christ, and how He is worthy of their service.

Finally, make it your decided aim to glorify Christ, and the Father will be pleased. For He loves for His Son to have the pre-eminence!