



Basic Evangelization Training

Course 3: Introduction to Christian Testimony

The Power of a Good Story

Hello, my name is Joe Philip, and I am glad to present lesson 3, of module one, of our online Basic Evangelization Training. The Module is "Introduction to Evangelization," and the lesson is "Introduction to Christian Testimony."

We read stories. We watch stories. We create stories. We think and talk in stories. We know that stories can move us to love, forgive, laugh, and rethink our lives. We also know stories have the power to make us hate, tempt us to sin, confuse us, and even change how we experience the rest of our lives. And right now, we are all living in a story. All of us together are part of a story full of characters, settings, and props...we call that story life! And everyone who's ever existed is part of a story called "his-story!" His- Story.

Think about it. If we all think, see, share and experience our lives as a story, who's the author? Who started this thing? Who willed that each of us exist, like a word on a page? And if it's a story, what kind of story will it turn out to be? Is it a comedy or a tragedy? Can we trust the author to lead us to a happy ending?

We're not just being poetic here. These are important questions and have much to do with evangelization. As Catholics, like everyone else, we not only live and enjoy stories; we know the power of a good story. We know the good Author behind the best story, the big story that's unfolding in history and in this moment. As followers of Jesus, we know the plot of the real story of love, sin, death, redemption and salvation that we call the Gospel! And knowing this BIG STORY gives us the ability to clear up the confusion in all the little stories. We have an awesome opportunity to bless and speak encouragement and truth into the lives of those we love and interact with on a daily basis. Our stories and the way we tell them all have the power to bring people closer to God, the Divine Author.

If we believe we are living in a good story, written by a good God, then how we share our lives, how we speak, how we see and interpret experiences – good and bad – will be from the perspective of joy. We not only know the Author, but we know the happy ending that's waiting for us! So to be an effective evangelist, you need to know the power that flows out of a good story. We need to harness that power and become good story-tellers.

So, before we talk about sharing specific personal stories of God's transformative love, called testimonies, let's reflect and get good at telling stories in general with a few questions. Question 1: What are the stories that have shaped how you see yourself, others, and the world? Question 2: As a child, did you enjoy stories? What were the kinds of stories that you read or were read to you? What effect did it have on you? Question 3: Are you a good story-teller?

Now, it's possible to get better, but it requires practice. So try it out. For practice: Try to retell a story that you loved in a way that it captures how you felt while also being relatable with those to whom you share it. Now, every story is powerful when shared with joy by a follower of Christ! So, go and tell a good one!

What Is a Personal Testimony?

Because God's an author, stories are not just our thing, but his thing. It's his idea to communicate, to move hearts, to convict sinners, to reveal truth. Read the Bible! Study Church history! Ask someone who loves Jesus about God in their lives! You'll hear a story. We love telling stories because God does!

When we tell our personal "God-Stories" we give other people a chance to hear about the Author of our life, but the Divine Author of all life - including theirs! By the power of the Holy Spirit, our stories of what God has done in our lives can open someone else up to the larger story of Jesus Christ that they are invited to enter into and live out of. This is what we call a Testimony. A testimony does two things no matter how it's done: One, it reveals God's initiative to love us to himself, and two, it reveals our response to his goodness. The Latin root *testamentum* means "covenant".

Covenants in the bible are super important: they are a series of family making rituals that God invites his people to enter into throughout the Old Testament. These family forming bonds begin in the Old Testament and find their fulfilment in Jesus who invites all humanity into a final and never-ending Covenant. This New Covenant reveals the mystery of God's love and, the truth of sin that separates us from that love. The New Covenant is how God invites us to turn away from living as orphans and enter into His Kingdom-family-Church and learn and grow in our new identity as beloved children forever and ever. Amen!

Yup. That's the perfect story. That's the possible happy ending that's open to everyone. Our testimony is a way that this happy ending breaks into the here and now and changes everything. A testimony is evidence of what God has done to win us over, how we responded to His presence, and as a result, how we've entered in - for the first time or more deeply---into the intimate covenant-family relationship God has with his Church.

Our testimony can remove Barriers that keep people from saying yes to God! Sharing our story in authentic and simple ways removes barriers that a lot of people have about "churchy" people and builds bridges of trust with people. Our testimony also gives examples of what a conversion looks like that people really need. They need to hear and see what it looks like to respond to Jesus as a disciple. Our stories can reveal the joy and peace that everyday people like you and I experience when they let God do what he does best - save!

Our testimony of a "one big way" or of the "many small ways" in which God has won us over ultimately tells our audience this: if God did it once in my life, he's ready, he's willing, and able to do it again in yours!

How do we Build our Testimony?

Remember as we are giving some introductory guidelines, a testimony is the good story about God's goodness and your response. It may take time to think, reflect, pray through it, but it's your story! Once you articulate what God has done and began to work through it, it's easy to adjust how you share and how much you share according to your audience and environment.

Let's start with a few key elements. The basic format of a testimony is as follows: "Before, During, and After" - just like a good story!

1. What was my life like before my encounter with God?
2. How did I come to know Jesus (his person, peace, joy, love, etc.) in a first, new or deeper way?
3. What has life been like since this experience?
4. And most important, your testimony provides an invitation for the person listening to respond or consider God's love for them

This structure is meant to help focus and train us in the truth: our testimony reveals God's love, demonstrates our response, and invites the audience to do the same. In the downloadable resources that come with this lesson, you can find some questions to help you form your testimony according to this format.

How do we Give our Testimony?

Let's keep going with key principles about developing our testimony. Our testimonies flow out of intimacy and gratitude. God's is blessing us so that he can be glorified, thanked, and adored in our lives. He loves us for our sake and that is why he is at work to save us! Rejoice in that! The primary reason we have a testimony is to honor God first. Our secondary reason is to share with others and watch him do in them what he did in us!

Our testimonies need to be concrete. No "One time, many years ago, in a far off place..." Our testimonies are not vague. They are specific in details. They communicate places, people, times, events and real experiences. We don't need to obsess over every detail, but we want people to know that our story actually happened in our everyday, relatable life.

Our testimonies need to be accessible. When we share our testimonies, we're not sharing an autobiography. It's about us, but it's not about us. It's our story, but it's for them. There's no value in sharing a story that someone can't relate to. We're not in the business of creating more roadblocks by sharing things in 'mystical' or otherworldly language. We're not trying to be impressive, we're being authentic so others can encounter God!

Our testimonies need to be simple. The "plot" or "thread" of the testimony is clear and easy to follow, without confusing tangents and elaborate details. Jesus Christ is at the center of this testimony. He is its hinge.

Our testimonies need to have a thematic structure. It's usually helpful to have just one overarching theme, image, or analogy when we build our testimony. One encounter with God can have many different themes like grace or peace or joy. One story can be told in different ways to highlight different themes, but to keep it orderly, stick with one theme to give it structure. Every point of the testimony should in some way be related to this single theme.

Let's talk briefly about delivery. Though there's many different ways to approach it, a basic testimony can be 1 minute or 10 to 15 minutes long. It all depends on your audience and listening to direction from the Holy Spirit. Learning how to deliver your testimony takes time. Over the years, some intro that I've used in conversations sounded like this: "I hear your arguments, but here's why I follow Jesus," or, "I'm so sorry to hear about what's been going on with you. You know what, can I share with you how God's helped me through something similar..." Or, "I understand how you feel. I struggle with the public scandals hitting the Church, too. As I've been battling through things, here is what God has been saying to me about my heart and his Church..." Or, "my marriage was on the rocks, but my wife and I started a long journey of praying together and it's changed everything. Can I share that with you?"

Sharing your testimony takes practice and prayer. Practice is hard, but worth it. You need the Holy Spirit and the boldness to take a risk. Practicing your basic testimony will help make it easier to take a risk and make your testimony much more fruitful. Now as a quick activity, pick a theme from the Bible like love, joy, mercy, freedom, peace, etc, and ask yourself the question, if I had 2 minutes to share about this theme from my life, what would I say? Try it out loud and go for it. Whatever comes to the top of your mind and without practice. Once you do that, take some time in prayer and rejoice and thank the Lord for what he has done in your life! He didn't do it just for you to share it! He did it because he loves you!

Next, ask him to help you share it because he loves others as much as he loves you! Using these basic principles and our outline, write out your testimony. If you're ready to be bold share it and ask for feedback. And as you pray and practice it, ask God to breath his life into it so that your story impacts others the way it's impacted you!

Practical Activity

Thanks for watching Lesson 3 on your personal testimony. Now, here's your practical activity. Pray about those times in your life when God has really revealed Himself, and formulate a personal testimony around those encounters with God. (Use the reference sheet from Lesson 3.4.) Then, pick out somebody in your life that you can share your testimony with. Maybe it's a friend or family member. Maybe it's a coworker or someone at school. Anybody you can share your testimony with will be helpful. The more you practice this, the better it will be, and the more souls will be impacted. One more thing: once you've completed your practical activity, please share your experience in our online forum. There's a special topic designed for each practical activity in the forum. In addition, this also is a required part of your certification, so thank you so much for taking the time to do it.

