

Icebreakers

1. What is the longest journey you have ever taken?
2. What's makes a story "good" to you in books, movies, etc...?

The Power of Your Story

The focus of this connection guide is to equip and encourage you to share your faith story with others. You will note that we emphasize the power of God using your story rather than memorizing and reciting Bible verses or being able to refute non-Christian philosophies / religions.

When we tell our story, we partner with what God is already doing in our life to pull us closer to Him. We can argue against straw-men, philosophical ideals, and historical questions surrounding the nature of God and reality all we want. However, none of that matters if our abstract ideas don't impact our concrete reality. We need to not just believe in God, but also experience him. Your experience "with God and in Christ" is your story, and that is powerful. Stories impact us to our core. People change when they have an encounter with God. When we share our stories of what God is doing in us, God uses that to draw others to Himself.

1 Peter 3:15-16 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

1 John 1: New Living Translation (NLT)

³ We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

Paul's story

Pastor Rick Warren said, "*stories are easier to relate to than principles, and people love to hear them; they capture our attention, and we remember them longer. Unbelievers would probably lose interest if you started quoting theologians, but they have a natural curiosity about experiences they've never had. Shared stories build a relational bridge that Jesus can walk across from your heart to theirs. Another value of your testimony is that it bypasses intellectual defenses. Many people who won't accept the authority of the Bible will listen to a humble, personal story. That's why on six different occasions Paul used his testimony to share the Gospel instead of quoting Scripture. (Acts 22 to Acts 26)*

Acts 22: 3-21 Christian Standard Bible (CSB)

Life before Christ

³ Paul said, "I am a Jewish man, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and educated according to the strict view of our patriarchal law. Being zealous for God, just as all of you are today, ⁴ I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women in jail, ⁵ as both the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. Having received letters from them to the brothers, I was traveling to Damascus to bring those who were prisoners there to be punished in Jerusalem.

Encounter with Christ

⁶ "As I was traveling and near Damascus, about noon an intense light from heaven suddenly flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' ⁸ "I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' "He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting!' ⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light, but they did not hear the voice of the One who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ "Then I said, 'What should I do, Lord?' "And the Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything that is assigned for you to do.' ¹¹ "Since I couldn't see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

Life with Christ

¹² Someone named Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good reputation with all the Jews residing there, ¹³ came to me, stood by me, and said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight.' And in that very hour I looked up and saw him. ¹⁴ Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear the sound of His voice. ¹⁵ For you will be a witness for Him to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now, why delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.' ¹⁷ "After I came back to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple complex, I went into a visionary state ¹⁸ and saw Him telling me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me!' ¹⁹ "But I said, 'Lord, they know that in synagogue after synagogue I had those who believed in You imprisoned and beaten. ²⁰ And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving, and I guarded the clothes of those who killed him.' ²¹ "Then He said to me, 'Go, because I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

Discussion Questions

- **Why did Paul share the “negative” stuff he did before he encountered Christ?**
- **What is the benefit of sharing the hard or painful parts of our story? What are the possible risks?**

Three kinds of stories Christians tell

- 1) **Conversion Stories**—This is usually a three-part story (What you were like before coming to Christ, how you came to the point of giving your life to him, and how Jesus has changed your life since then). How did Paul’s testimony in Acts 21-22 follow this pattern? Briefly, what would yours look like?
- 2) **Transformation Stories**—The man in John 9:25 said, “I was blind and now I see!” Jot down a short story that describes something specific that God has recently done or taught you. It could relate to your work, marriage, family, money or any number of other things.
- 3) **Come and See Stories**—How did the woman at the well in John 4 do this? This is how Andrew brought his brother Peter to meet Jesus. (see John 1:40-42) How could you go about inviting someone to your home, a Christ-centered event or a Bible Study?

Discussion Questions

- **Share one of the three kinds of stories with your group. Try to do this in 3-4 minutes.**

Story telling made better

Hospitality “the way we live our lives” Matters

*Matt Chandler said, “In all times and places, but perhaps even more so in this current cultural climate, I believe that evangelism almost always starts with hospitality. That might sound strange, especially seeing how this idea of hospitality got hijacked by Martha Stewart and became less about a **way we live our lives** and more about how we decorate and prepare meals for the seasons.”*

Transparency and Authenticity trumps eloquence and polish

Most people are hung up on “how to tell.” That is really inconsequential in most instances. After all, transparency and authenticity trump eloquence and polish any day. Mark 5:19 is Jesus’ simple instructions to the man who was delivered from a legion of demons. Jesus simply said, “Go home to your family and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been.” That requires neither training, great locution, or even courage—just honesty and transparency. Be transparent with the good news. (Free Methodist Bishop Matt Thomas)

So What Now? We suggest the following 5-step strategy

1. **Write it out** use this simple step-by-step “story worksheet”: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5da89658f6d96b1bf0e50c40/t/5e80a8da7995013073919624/1585490140820/PERSONAL+TESTIMONY+WORKSHEET.pdf>
2. **Pray for an Opportunity** ask God to orchestrate an opportunity to share your story
3. **Get a prayer partner** ask a Christian friend to pray for you before you share your story
4. **Review it** after you have shared your story, review how it went with your prayer supporter
5. **Rinse and Repeat** ... hey, it works for shampooing your hair, right?! 😊

Deeper study and more resources

The following are resources to help you take your next right step in tearing down any strongholds in your life.

- **How to Share your story** – C.S. Lewis Institute: https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/334
- **6 Principles for Sharing your Story** – <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sharing-your-testimony/>
- **Atheist to Christian: Dan's Story** – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2LAX4k2cck>
- **Seeking Allah; Finding Jesus; Nabeel Qureshi's story** – <https://youtu.be/nGCsx2cdCo0>
- **Michelle Williams: A story of faith** – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84f2qEY_EcU

Questions for the Pastors and Staff?

If you would like contact from one of our pastors or staff, we invite you to reach out to any or all of us.

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