

Session Two
How iShare

Dr. J. Marcus Merritt

Every believer has a redemption story; often we call it a *testimony*. Your own personal testimony can be used to bring others to faith in Christ. It was said of the woman at the well, “*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony...*” Jn. 4:39 (NIV). Testimonies are powerful because they personalize the Gospel message.

The Apostle Paul shared his story on at least two occasions in the book of Acts: once in chapter twenty-two to an angry mob in Jerusalem, and then again in chapter twenty-six to King Agrippa. Both times Paul’s story is broken into three distinct sections. First, Paul told about his former life, prior to meeting Christ. Next he recounted how he came to know Christ. Finally, Paul explained how his life changed as a result of his meeting Christ.

Paul’s testimony in Acts 22:

- His Former Life – vs. 1-5
- How He Came to Know Christ – vs. 6-10
- How His Life Changed – vs. 13-16

Paul’s testimony in Acts 26:

- His Former Life – vs. 1-11
- How He Came to Know Christ – vs. 12-18
- How His Life Changed – vs. 19-23

Paul used the same outline each time but emphasized different aspects of his conversion experience to fit the need of the particular audience. Expect your story to sound a little different each time you share it. A testimony is not meant to sound like a “canned speech,” but is most effective when it is part of an authentic dialog between two people.

iShare Tip:

Keep your testimony to approximately three minutes. Paul & the Samaritan woman’s testimonies were short but effective. You will lose the attention of the person if you fail to keep it brief and conversational.

Paul’s testimony story is not limited to the book of Acts but is also found in his letters. In Philippians, for example, Paul talked about his former life compared to his life subsequent to following Christ. Again in First Timothy, Paul recounted his former practice of persecuting the church and how God’s grace and forgiveness had changed his whole life by giving him a new life in Christ. Paul constantly shared his testimony story with those whom he encountered.

However, the best way for us to win people to Christ is not by sharing Paul’s testimony, but by sharing our own. Sharing your testimony story is simply explaining to others what has happened to you. You can’t mess that up! All you do is answer the same three questions that Paul did.

1. What was your life like before you became a follower of Christ?
2. How did you come to know Christ?
3. What is your life like now that you have become a follower of Christ?

Each time you share your story, you are actually sharing the message of the Gospel. Remember, the thing that transformed you from your “before” life, to your “after” life, was the Gospel of Christ. Paul wrote in Rom. 1:18: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek* (NASB). Paul could write that because he had experienced it. Your testimony serves as a living illustration that the Gospel still has the power to transform lives.

I. My Life Before I Met Christ

What was life like for you before you became a Christ-follower? Were you a drug addict, a philanderer, or merely disobedient to your parents? While we might have been involved in different categories of sin, one thing we all have in common: we were all sinners (Rom. 3:23).

At this point you should affirm the sin of your former life while neither glamorizing nor exaggerating it. The focus should be on the *results* of your sin (Rom. 6:23a) and not the specific acts themselves. What did sin do to you (Isa. 59:2)? How did sin leave you feeling?

iShare Tip:

Do not glamorize or exaggerate your sin. Focus instead on how your sin affected you.

The reason not to focus on specific sins is simple. If I keep *emphasizing* to a moral man that I was a drunk, that moral man might conclude that he does not need Christ since he is not an alcoholic. The moral person might come to the erroneous conclusion that only “bad” people need to be saved. On the other hand, if I *emphasize* that my sin left me feeling disconnected from God, the person to whom I am witnessing will likely relate to those feelings. Sin (of any category) has negative consequences and always leaves people unsatisfied in the end.

The author of this material has helped people all over the country write out their respective testimonies. It was not difficult to detect certain phrases that appeared time and time again when those participants described their life prior to meeting Christ. Below are the top responses to the question “Describe your life before you met Christ:”¹

- I felt guilty and/or ashamed
- I had no purpose or direction in my life
- I felt disconnected from God
- Life was meaningless
- I tried to earn God’s favor and love
- I felt empty inside

The above feelings can be true of lost persons of any age because the wages of sin are always the same.

Since I was saved at a young age, my “Before” section sounds something like this:

- (I) Even though I had always attended church and tried to be a good person, there came a point in my life when I had to admit that something was missing. I had no peace in my life. I felt totally disconnected from God-like my prayers weren’t getting any higher than my head. I felt guilty all the time and began wondering what would happen to me if I died that way.

This approach does not dwell on the specific sins of an adolescent, thereby making it relatable to persons of any age or culture. Many lost people know what it means to feel guilty, far away from God, or fearful of eternity.

¹ Anecdotal evidence from surveys by the author

iShare Tip:

It is ok to mention specific sins but remember to keep the *emphasis* on how the sin made you feel.

Using your iShare worksheet, write out your “Before I Met Christ” section. Emphasize how your un-forgiven sin left you feeling. Remember not to use any words or phrases that might be unfamiliar or confusing to someone who comes from a non-church background

II. How I Came to Know Christ

In the second part you will share how you came to realize your need for Christ and the circumstances surrounding your decision to trust him. It is here that you want to share the heart of the Gospel message. Do not worry about quoting a whole string of verses; just share the basics and help them understand the gospel. Talk about discovering the fact that you could not earn your way to heaven. Mention your conviction over your sin, and how you came to understand that only Jesus could fix your problem.

The presentation should follow this basic flow:

1. Humanity’s problem: We are all sinners (Rom. 3:23)
2. Sin separates us from God and must be punished (Isa. 59:2, Rom.6:23a)
3. We can’t fix our sin problem by trying to be good (Isa. 64:6, Titus 3:5, Eph. 2:8-9)
4. Jesus died & arose to solve our sin problem by taking our punishment & providing for our righteousness (Rom. 5:6-8, Col. 2:14)
5. God wants us to **TURN** from our sin [repent] (Acts 2:38, 2 Cor. 7:10)
6. And **TRUST** Christ alone to forgive and save us from our sins forever (John 3:16, Rom. 10:9-11)
7. If we will call upon him to forgive us and save us-He will! (Rom. 10:13)

In section I you are relating that your life was going in the wrong direction. In section III you are testifying that life is now meaningful and joyful. That means that something must have happened in section II to fundamentally change you. Section II is the most important part of sharing your story because it is the section where the Gospel is shared. It is the Gospel that has made the difference.

iShare Tip:

Presenting a clear Gospel presentation in your own words is the most important part of sharing your testimony.

My personal story transitions from section I into section II like this:

(II) It was then that I discovered from the Bible why I felt that way. My problem was sin (Rom. 3:23) and my sin had separated me from God (Isa. 59:2). I felt guilty and incomplete because of that separation. It felt so bad being separated from God at that moment that I couldn’t imagine being separated from him forever in Hell (Rom. 6:23a). But how was I going to make things right? I learned that the Bible says that salvation is not achieved by good works, or else we could brag about our own accomplishment (Eph. 2:8-9). So just trying to be “better” was not the solution. It was right then that I understood that Jesus Christ had died on the

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cross so I could be forgiven. He bore my punishment (Rom. 5:6-8, Col. 2:14). God was angry at my sin but Jesus took all that anger upon himself, and died in my place. But because Jesus was not only a man but also God, he arose again the third day and is now in heaven waiting for me to speak to him. I wanted to speak to him; I wanted to tell him how sorry I was for my sin and how glad I was that he died for me (Acts 2:38, 2 Cor. 7:10). I wanted to be forgiven and be a part of His family. So I placed all my faith in him and prayed something like this (John 3:16):

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and I am sorry for that. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sin and then arose. Please forgive me for all of my sins & help me turn from them. I now confess you as my Lord and Savior and trust you alone for my salvation. Thank you for the free gift of eternal life. Amen (Rom. 10:9-13)

The preacher read to me from the Bible where it says: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13 NIV). That’s why I knew that my life had just changed.

Using your iShare worksheet, write out your own “How I met Christ” section. Remember to emphasize the Gospel message. Communicate how you “called upon the Name of the Lord” (was it a prayer?). Also emphasize that the Bible promises forgiveness and salvation to everyone who places genuine faith in Christ

III. My Life Now

Finally, discuss what your life is like now. Don’t pretend that you are perfect, or have all the answers – just be honest. Simply express that you are still growing in your relationship with Christ, but you now have a peace and a purpose in life that you never had before. The same survey that found similar pre-conversion experiences also noted common wording in a number of post-conversion lives. Common descriptors for “My Life Now” were:

- I have peace because I am forgiven.
- My life has purpose and meaning.
- I know I am part of God’s family.
- I can pray to God & He hears me!
- I live my life “On Mission.”

iShare Tip:

Humans are wired with an innate need to belong. That explains why people join various groups, teams, clubs, even cults and gangs. But the best way to satisfy that God-given desire is to belong to the family of God!

You might want to end your testimony with a story to illustrate how God has sustained you through a difficult time in your life. Perhaps you fought cancer, lost a close relative, or battled through addiction. Share how having God’s Holy Spirit living within you sustained you through that dark period of your life.

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“My Life Now” sounds like this:

- (III) Since that day, my life has not been perfect. I have failed God many times. But I know that I am God’s child and that he put me here for a reason. I now go to church to worship and to fellowship and to grow in my relationship with Christ. I no longer go to try to “score points” with God or just to appease my conscience.

During the greatest trial of my life, Christ was with me and gave me peace. One afternoon my father was struck headlong on his Harley Davidson by a passing car almost right in front of my house. Even though he was killed instantly, I had a peace that passes all understanding. Because both he and I have trusted Christ to forgive and save us, I knew we would be together again someday.

Transition to Invitation:

Now your testimony has ended and the person with whom you are sharing has heard a compelling story-but you are not done yet. Now you want to give that person an opportunity to have a similar experience with Christ. The Samaritan woman turned her testimony into an invitation for others to believe, and so should we.

When I transition my personal story into an invitation, it sounds like this:

Since I genuinely trusted Christ to forgive me and be my Savior, my life has never been the same. Do you remember what I said to God? Something like:

Dear God, I know that I am a sinner and I am sorry for that. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sin and then arose. Please forgive me for all of my sins & help me turn from them. I now confess you as my Lord and Savior and trust you alone for my salvation. Thank you for the free gift of eternal life. Amen

Does that sound like something you would like to say to God? Do you believe that you are guilty of sin, worthy of death, and unable to help yourself? Would you like to call upon God to forgive you of your sins and make you His child? Can I help you confess that Jesus is your Lord right now? If so, your life will never be the same.

iShare Tip:

There are no magic words or secret incantations that bring about true salvation- it is a matter of faith. The Bible is clear that we must turn from our sin (repent), believe/confess that “Jesus is Lord,” and call upon Him in faith to save us (Rom. 10:9-13). Calling upon God is another way of describing prayer. Therefore it is biblical to ask someone to pray to receive Christ’s free gift of forgiveness and salvation.

Most people will have questions. Expect that. Remember that this is to be a dialog and not a monologue. You may talk for minutes, hours, days, or even years off-and-on; just keep the dialogue open if at all possible. It might be that you have planted and another will harvest somewhere down the road. However, do not be shocked if some people will want to immediately “pray to receive Christ.” It is always amazing to see people respond to a Gospel invitation. The fact that you are wrapping the Gospel around your personal story makes it even more

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compelling. Never forget that it is actually the Holy Spirit who convicts people of their sins and draws them to Christ. He is doing the actual work – we are just tools in his hands. One of my former professors put it this way; “Christians have been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20). This ministry charges the believer to seek to join together sinful man and holy God ... [and] ... to urge the hearer to decide for Christ.”²

Write out your own “My Life Now” section using your iShare worksheet. Emphasize what life has been like with Jesus accompanying you. Then write your own transition into an invitation.

Closing

Now that your own testimony is completely written, read it aloud. It may be five or ten minutes long. If so, eliminate every nonessential detail until you get it down to about three minutes. Then, practice reciting it until you can do it without notes. Do not be surprised if it comes out a little different each time. The key to this strategy is practice. Practice reciting your story until you can say it with ease. Remember: your story should not be over three minutes long but your conversation can last as long as the person wants to talk. If the person does not want to pray to receive Christ, remember that God can still take that planted seed and bring it to life at a later date. Just keep sharing your story!

² Mark Tolbert, “Invitations with Integrity.” *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church for Harvest*, Thomas P. Johnston, ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 107-8.