

How to structure your story

Before you begin to formulate your own story, it is a good idea to look at some of the examples of personal stories God gives in the Bible. Take a few minutes right now to read these stories before going any further.

- The story of the man who was born blind, but now can see. *John 9*
- The story of the divorced woman who tells of meeting an amazing man. *John 4:1-45*
- The story of the Apostle Paul who is on trial before King Agrippa. *Acts 26*

The lessons from these stories will help you reflect on your own story.

- God doesn't expect you to know all the answers to people's questions. It is okay to say, "I don't know." The man who was born blind simply replied to his interrogators, "Whether (Jesus) is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."
- You do not have to make it up or embellish your story. For example, it would be okay to say, "Once I was blind, but now I am not so blind." God uses imperfect people with incomplete stories. If God only used perfect people, nothing would ever get done!
- Your story is a first-hand account of God. Each of the above stories revolves around what they experienced directly. They are all deeply personal stories from first-hand experiences, not just spiritual theories they learned somewhere.
- Your personal stories always lead to Jesus, what Jesus has done and is

doing in your life, and what Jesus can do in the lives of others.

- The length of your personal story depends on the situation. It could be two sentences (like the divorced woman's story), or a detailed account of your journey of faith (like Paul's story before King Agrippa.)

With these lessons understood, now it is time to construct your personal story. While there is not a single template that fits every life story or situation, the following suggested structure is a good place to begin. You may come up with a different style, and that is okay. It may help you to think of your life's story in four parts.

- 1. What my life was like before I met Jesus**
- 2. How I realized my need for Jesus**
- 3. How I committed my life to Jesus**
- 4. The difference Jesus has made in my life**

If you became a Christian as an adult, follow this process.

- 1. What my life was like before I met Jesus**

- What common circumstances would an unbeliever identify with?
- What were your attitudes that an unbeliever would identify with?
- What was most important to you?
- What substitute for God did you use to find meaning in your life? For example, sports/fitness, success at work, marriage, sex, making money, drugs/alcohol, having fun, entertainment, popularity, and hobbies.

- 2. How I realized my need for Jesus**

- What significant steps led up to your conversion?
- What needs, hurts, or problems made you dissatisfied with the way you were living without God?
- How did God get your attention? What motivated you?

3. **How I committed my life to Jesus**

- What specifically did you do?
- Where did it happen?
- What did you say in your prayer? Be specific.

4. **The difference Jesus has made in my life**

- What benefits have you experienced or felt?
- What problems have been resolved?
- How has Jesus helped you change for the better?
- How has it helped your relationships?

Use the following guidelines if you became a Christian as a child, but walked away or never grew until a deeper recommitment as an adult.

- Use the same four steps, but start with the time just prior to your *recommitment*.
- Give some examples of how you were trying to meet your own needs without Christ but it wasn't working.
- Describe what caused you to realize you needed Christ directing your life and how you made a full commitment to him.

- Explain how Jesus is currently meeting the deepest needs in your life.

Use the following guidelines if you became a Christian as a child and never really strayed from the Lord.

- Use the same four steps with this modification:
- Point out some deep need or common problem that you see *other people* trying to resolve.
- Point out how unsuccessful their attempts are to meet their own need.
- Explain why you never experienced that problem by trusting Christ early in life. Don't say the exact age. Continue with steps 3 and 4.

Here are some suggestions to get started on the above steps.

1. Find a quiet place where you'll be able to have uninterrupted time.
2. Pray first. Ask God to reveal his story in your life.
3. Try to identify central "themes" of your story.
4. Write it all down. Include it all at first, then review it later and adjust it after you've had some time to reflect on it.

One important last thought about structuring your story. It is not a static story of the past. Your story is still being written! It is alive and breathing and growing. While this template has given you a good working framework to begin, sometimes the best stories are the most current ones. So it is a good idea to ask yourself the question, "What chapters has God written since I last told my story?"