

## How to Give a Good Witness Talk

*“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.”*

*1 Peter 3: 15*

Throughout the New Testament, we read over and over again the testimony of the first disciples. Some, like Saul, had powerful encounters with the Living God. Others, like Peter, had subtle, less dramatic conversions through a continuous relationship with Jesus Christ. No matter how, when or where your conversion happened, it is powerful! In the early Church, it was the testimony of the disciples that wrought the conversion of many early Christians. Your testimony or witness is like your own personal story of salvation.

There are three reasons why your personal testimony has a HUGE impact on others:

1. People who know you are interested in you and your life; and those who don't know you will become interested in knowing you. In knowing you, they will come to know Christ.
2. Other people can relate to your story. It takes the biblical accounts of Jesus Christ off the page and brings them to life, incarnate in *your* life.
3. You are the authority on your life. No one can argue with the fact that your life has been changed by God. This helps take Christianity out of the philosophical, apologetic, argumentative realm and brings it to the level of belief.

The first and most important part of preparing your testimony is prayer. Call upon the Holy Spirit to fill you with God's love and grace, to direct your thoughts and words, and to open the hearts of those who will hear God speak through you.

The second most important part of giving an effective testimony is to abide by the 1/3 rule, that is using 1/3 of your time for each of the following:

- 1/3 = Life before Christ/God
- 1/3 = Life during your conversion
- 1/3 = Life after your conversion

**BEFORE** – This part of your testimony is about what your life was like before you knew Christ. Where were you spiritually? How did that affect your feelings, attitudes, actions and relationships? Before you became committed to God and your faith, what were some of the things that began to draw you? For many of us who are cradle Catholics, this section might be more about what life was like before Christ/God became an *important* part of our lives, i.e. life before truly living our faith and connecting with God in a real way.

DURING – This section is about the events and people surrounding the conversion point. *Be very specific!* The more details in this section the better. What motivated you to make Christ/God a part of your life or bigger part of your life? Who was involved? How did you realize your need for God? How did you come (back) to God? Focus on painting the picture in the minds of your listeners.

AFTER – This final part should communicate what your life has been like since the conversion point. What has changed in your life? To conclude, finish this sentence: *“My prayer for you is...”*

It is VITAL that you give *equal* time to each section. We’ve all heard testimonies that seem to go on endlessly about life before encountering Christ. This can leave the listener with a really strong impression about all the terrible things you did before your conversion, but is that what we want him/her to walk away with? We want our listeners to be able to relate to our past in order to see hope for the future. The focus of your witness should be on what God has done in your life, not on what you have done (good or bad.)

Here are a few other tips:

- Witness talks can be general about your whole life, or can be tailored to one specific encounter. Either way, the talk should be geared towards that particular audience and be *relevant to them and the topic for the program*.
- Be conscientious of the time you’ve been allotted. If you’re given 15 minutes total, keep an eye on the clock or a friend in the crowd giving hand signals for when you hit the 5 and 10 minute mark. This will not only help keep things running on time, but will help you abide by the 1/3 rule.
- It’s beneficial to write out your testimony as an outline, not a narrative, so that if the time allotted is decreased, you can easily pick out the most important parts of your talk. It’s OK if you need notes... Just be sure to talk with the group and not at them.
- Avoid bragging and condescension, but also avoid self-deprecation. Even in our sin, God loves us and has bestowed on us dignity having been created in His image and likeness.
- Details! Be specific throughout your testimony.
  - Example of Poor Detail: I went to confession that night and it was incredible. I can’t even describe it.
  - Example of Good Detail: My friend Tammy encouraged me to go to Confession that night on Fall Retreat. She said I really needed to go and that I would feel much better after. I was nervous walking into the Confessional. There was music playing and I heard the song, “Lay It Down”. I felt like that was God telling me to stop fighting it and give in to Him. I spent 30 minutes in the confessional,

pouring out my heart to this priest. I was just crying because I felt so overwhelmed by God's love for me. When I was done...

- Hopefully you can see the difference. You have to paint the picture so the person can put himself or herself in your shoes and enter into the story.
- Be careful to not use "Church language" that the listener will not understand. If you need to use a "Churchy" word because it relates to your testimony, be sure to explain what it means. Knowing your audience is SUPER important!
- Think about a common thread or theme throughout your testimony. Some examples include forgiveness, redemption, healing, deliverance or vocation. The theme should be in each 1/3 of your testimony. This will give the listener a framework for understanding.
- Be enthusiastic and smile. Your joy is contagious!
- Speak clear and loud. We want to hear every word!
- Try to avoid distracting mannerisms like playing with a ring or hair, rubbing your nose, excessive pacing, or squeaky shoes.
- Using Sacred Scripture helps the listener connect your personal story to the greatest love story of God and His family. Perhaps this is a word of Scripture that was influential in your conversion or a word that sums up some part of your journey.
- Consider what is taking place directly *before* your talk and directly *after* your talk. Based on the pulse of the room, you may consider reworking your piece to fit into the bigger picture. You may realize that this group is not ready for some of the deep stuff you planned to share, or maybe the deep stuff is exactly what they need to hear. Only you will know by paying attention to the bookends on either side of your testimony. Keep the big picture in mind, realizing that your witness is only one component of our overall goal.

Above all, rely on God's grace for your preparation and delivery. In this earthly life, we will never fully know how God uses us for the building up of His Kingdom. Trust in God! Trust in what He has done for you and what He will do through you.

*"Pray, hope and don't worry! Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer."*

*Padre Pio*