

Today we are going to look at the power of a personal testimony:

T.H. Huxley, a well-known agnostic, was with a group of men at a weekend house party. On Sunday morning, while most of them were preparing to go to church, he approached a man known for his Christian character and said, "Suppose you stay at home and tell me why you are a Christian." The man, knowing he couldn't match wits with Huxley, hesitated. But Huxley said gently, "I don't want to argue with you. I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you." The man did, and when he finished, there were tears in Huxley's eyes as he said, "I would give my right hand if only I could believe that!"

In today's society, it often seems that the story is more important than the truth. We don't hesitate to tell friends and coworkers about our experiences at some new restaurant, what we thought of a movie or TV show, or how our favorite team did last week, but are we telling them about what really matters in life? As Bobbi told me several months ago when we were talking about the need to share

the Gospel, “we can’t keep the hope we know tucked away, or it will grow stagnant.” But how is the church in America doing?

A 1980 Gallup poll indicated that out of all evangelical, American believers, only two percent had introduced another person to Christ. I doubt seriously that the number has gone up since then, and that’s a really sad statement. As Christians we are not only called to be the bearers of the good news, we are also called to be sharers of the good news. We have the most important story of them all to share- the good news of Jesus Christ.

The institute for American church growth asked over 10,000 people this question: "What was responsible for your coming to the church you now attend?" This is how they replied:

I had a special need 2%

I just walked in 3%

I liked the Pastor 6%

I visited there 1%

I liked the Sunday School 1%

I liked the programs 3%

A friend or relative invited me 79%

I think we all understand the power of a personal testimony. Advertisers use this tool all the time in an effort to get people interested in their product, and ultimately, get them to buy it. There is something persuasive about seeing and hearing a person who is a satisfied customer telling how their life was changed or how they benefited because of it.

Would you agree that the greatest decision anybody on this earth can make is to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? Well, if you already know Christ, you have something in your possession that can be powerful in persuading others to accept Christ.

What am I talking about? It is your personal testimony – simply telling others what Christ has done in your life. There's a story in the gospel of Mark that tells about Jesus healing a man with many demons. When the man

asked to go with Jesus, Mark 5:19 tells us that Jesus, “did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”

Everyone who has been saved has a personal testimony. Everybody’s testimony is unique and different. Sharing your testimony with others can be a powerful way to share the gospel of Christ with others. Many people will never agree to do a Bible study with you or come to church with you. but if you have a friendship or relationship with them, they will allow you to share your story... a friend will usually be interested in learning about you.

Every believer can share their testimony with others. Our text this week is the same as the one for last week; John chapter 4:4-42 – It’s a long story, and since we read it last week we won’t take the time to re-read it this morning, but I encourage you to follow along and to read it during the week. It’s the story about Jesus changing the life of a woman He met at a well in Samaria. After Christ changed her life, she proceeded to share her testimony with

everybody in her town. Let's use the woman at the well as our teaching tool today and see how every believer can share their testimony with others.

First, tell them about your life before Christ.

This lady had a past. We all do, don't we? Do you remember your life without Christ? Aren't you glad you know Christ today? Remember from last week – She had been married and cast off by 5 husbands and was now living with a man who wasn't her husband. She was an outcast, scorned and shunned by everyone in her town. Not the best of personal testimonies, but they all knew her story up to this point.

Jesus revealed who He was to this woman (vs. 25-26). She believed on Christ, and notice what she did next (vs. 28-29). She went and told everyone in her town. "Come and see this man who told me everything I've ever done.... Could this be the Messiah?

When you share your testimony, tell them briefly about your life before Christ. Here are a few practical suggestions:

- **Don't be too detailed. A long story can get boring and lose their interest. Share what you are comfortable sharing.**
- **Try to find elements of your past that others can identify with and relate to... If you look at Paul witnessing in Acts, when he witnessed to Jews he would share with them his background as a Jewish Pharisee and his previous zeal for the Jewish religion, because that's what they could relate to.**

As you share with people about your previous lost condition, you can use the truths of Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23 as a tool. While it's best to know and quote the scriptures word for word, if you don't know them it can be as simple as, "I was going against God... Everybody does, and I deserved to be punished for it." God can still use the truth even if you have to paraphrase it.

Second, point them to Jesus.

Let them know that you found the answer, purpose, and meaning to life. It's Jesus! You can never go wrong by bragging on Jesus! Magnify Him and lift Him up. Looking at

the simple statement we just mentioned about sin, you could continue with the last part of Romans 6:23 and Romans 5:8 with something as simple as, “But the good news is that the Bible says Christ died to pay the penalty for what I did.”

Notice in the story of the woman at the well that the woman told everybody in town, “Come, see a man...” She wanted them to see Jesus. As you share your story of salvation, tell them about how you came to realize that Christ died for your sins.

Here are some practical tips.

- **Our testimony should always point people to the sufficiency of Christ. Christ’s sacrifice was enough to pay for every sin committed by every person, but not everyone will accept the free gift he offers.**

- **Always make clear who Christ is and what He has done. Tell them in simple terms that Jesus is the Son of God, fully God and fully man, that he was born in human form, lived a sinless life, died on a cross to pay for your sins, rose again on the 3rd day, is in heaven preparing a place for you, and**

that he's coming to earth again to take you to heaven to live with him forever.

- **Tell them about how you were saved. What did you do?**

Who led you to Christ? Where were you when you got saved?

- **Explain to them how your life has changed since accepting Christ.**

- **In a few words, make sure they understand what Christ has meant to you since the time of your salvation.**

Third, trust God to do the work. Even though you are telling your story, it's really not about you. It's about what Christ has done and is doing through you. You are planting a seed, but the harvest is up to God.

1. Notice in our text verses 40-42. It seems that some of these people were tough nuts to crack. They didn't believe the woman until they went and met Jesus themselves. But Christ's Word worked in them mightily and convinced them.

One thing to remember is that your personal testimony is not a substitute for God's Word. While it may be what gets their

initial attention, there is no authority in your testimony. The authority is in God's Word. This is why your testimony should be laced with Scripture. As I said before, if you know the scriptures by heart, use them. If you don't know them, don't let that stop you from paraphrasing and sharing the basic truths contained in them. God can still use imperfect tools and testimonies. Which brings us to the fourth point....

Fourth, expect God to use you. The Bible is clear that God can use broken vessels, and that includes a bunch of crackpots like me and you

God used this woman to touch many lives. Her past didn't matter. God still used her. It is interesting to note the peoples' responses to this woman's testimony. Some of the people believed on Christ right away when they heard this woman's testimony (vs. 39). Others didn't believe right away, but she planted a seed that was then watered later by Christ (vs. 40-41).

Sometimes sharing your testimony can be used to lead a person to Christ; other times it will begin to create a thirst

and hunger in them to know more about Christ. But when you share your testimony and God's truth, it's never in vain. God will always use it. So, expect God to work in and through you. If God can use a woman with a tainted and immoral past in such a mighty way, He can use anybody, even you and me.

Let's take a quick look at one of the most effective witnesses in the history of the church – the Apostle Paul:

- 1. Paul's personal encounter with Jesus Christ enabled him to speak about truth and love. Paul's wholehearted defense came from a firm conviction that he was speaking out of obedience to the God who desired all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**
- 2. Paul's testimony affected lives because it came from a man who could identify with the pain of his audience. Paul identified with his audience by citing his credentials in a way that demonstrated God's transforming power in his life. Paul said, "I was brought up in Jerusalem, sat at the feet of Gamaliel, taught**

according to the strictness of our father's law and was zealous toward God as you all are today.” ...Ask the Lord to help you to make connections with whoever you're speaking with in a way that you let's establish good emotional, social, political, and spiritual connections. Make sure that you know what's important to the people you are witnessing to, and try to make your testimony relevant to their needs. Ask the Lord to help you speak as God spoke to you.

- 3. Paul cited the ways God had personally communicated to him. God spoke to him through a dramatic heavenly vision; through deliverance from a lifestyle of destruction; through a miraculous healing and through commands to reach the Gentiles. By describing the source of his authority, Paul put his accusers in a position of opposing the very God they professed to worship. Ask the Lord to help you stick with the facts of your coming to Christ. Don't overstate or exaggerate, but clearly tell them of the power and impact of the encounter.**

4. Paul realized that he might not be able to change the minds of hateful people but he could still muster the courage to obey God and do what he could. Don't be discouraged if you think your testimony is falling on deaf ears. You are planting seeds, and the harvest is up to God.

5. Paul found ways to find the social, historical, mental, emotional, religious and spiritual keys to the hearts of his audience. Paul knew that every person has locked doors to protect their emotional inner being. Good communicators learn how to connect to the perceptions of their audience. Ask the Lord to help you find the keys to unlock the doors to the hearts and minds of your audience.

I know for me, and I would guess for some of you, the fear of failure sometimes holds me back from witnessing. When fear pops up, I ask myself the following questions:

1. Does this fear come basically from pride, a fear that I won't live up to my own expectations or to those of others?

2. Do I remember that God has called me to be faithful, not necessarily successful? I can plant a seed, but the harvest is ultimately up to Him.

3. Do I trust that the Holy Spirit is working before me, with me, and through me?

4. Do I remember that God does his greatest work when I seem to be weakest?

In case you haven't already figured it out, reaching out to the lost is very important to Christ, and because of that it needs to be very important to us. God has placed a great harvest right outside our doors, and like Jesus said, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few." If our church is to meet the challenges facing us in fully meeting God's will and expectations for us, we need to be growing spiritually in faith, wisdom, and holiness, but to carry the load we also need to grow physically. That's why I have been and am continuing to challenge you. This week and every week this month invite at least one person to come to church with you... Whether or not they come isn't up to you, but the point

is to get you in the habit of witnessing and inviting people.

Hopefully a habit that will continue far into the future.

If you need to talk to God about developing that habit, or if you have any other business you need to take care of with God, the altar is open during this last song.

Let's pray