

the
2nd
greatest
story
ever
told.

Howdy, Friend!

I'm excited you've picked up this resource to help you reveal your story! I'm confident that by sharing about your journey with God, many others will be encouraged. Some may even be encouraged to the point of beginning their own relationship with Jesus! So way to go in taking this step of articulating your story.

Don't worry if you think your story is too boring (it's not!). You might assume that since you aren't a former cult leader or worse that your story isn't wild enough to count.

Friend, you couldn't be more wrong. Wild or tame, it's *your story—and it should be told!*

Over the next few pages I'll walk you through a simple 4-step process that is intended to help you articulate and write out your testimony—i.e. the story of your journey with God. Most people who do this find the steps easy to follow, but they also quickly realize that the process takes more than just a few minutes to work through. It will take some time, but don't get discouraged—working through these steps could be a very important process in your life! And not only your life, but in the life of someone you might reveal it to.

It's worth it. Once you complete this too, you'll have a written story that will help you powerfully illustrate—to you and others—how God loves us, rescues us, and makes an unending difference in a person's life.

I'm cheering you on, and so excited that your story will be told!

You Are Loved!

Josh

¹ One thing to acknowledge right out of the gate is that this material is an adaptation of a tool I formerly used with high school students called "The 2nd Greatest Story Ever Told" by Doug Fields. So Doug gets all the credit for this. And whether you're a student or not, I think this resource will be a help to you revealing your story!

Step 1: You DO have something to share!

EVERYONE HAS A STORY. ARE YOU READY TO TELL YOURS?

A testimony is an exciting way to proclaim how God has been at work in a person's life. But, the word "testimony" can often be confusing. When I encourage people to share their testimony and they're not sure exactly what that means, they usually ask one of three questions:

What's a testimony?

Why should I share my story?

What if I don't have anything interesting to share?

Let's answer these questions...

What's a testimony?

Great question! It's a lot of things. A testimony is...

- your spiritual life-story
- your statement of faith
- a map of your spiritual journey
- a photo album that reveals your thoughts about Jesus Christ

Basically, a testimony is a story. It's YOUR story! It's a story about you and your relationship with Jesus. EVERYONE has a story, even non-Christians! (Huh?) That's right, people who are far from God can tell their story about what they think of Jesus just as easily as those who are close to him. (Although for those far from God, without a relationship with Jesus, their story isn't complete).

But since you're reading this, it's likely that you *do* have a relationship with Jesus Christ—and as a Christian, you can tell the WHOLE story!

Why should I share my story?

Why tell your story? Because it will probably be a great experience for you, and others need to hear different examples of how God works. There is mutual blessing when a

testimony is shared. In Romans 1:12 the Apostle Paul tells us that it is beneficial for us to be “mutually encouraged by each other's faith.”

How? Everyone receives encouragement when a testimony is shared. You get encouraged when you prepare by spending time thinking, praying, and writing. That very process will serve as a reminder of all that God has done in your life. Since it's so easy to lose sight of that, telling your story will bring it all back and give you a proper perspective of God's work in your life.

As an added benefit, the listeners will also receive encouragement. Like you, Christian listeners will be reminded of how great God is, and this can cause them to be more receptive to God's presence in their lives.

Also, those who are far from God get a real, live example of how God makes a difference in a person's life. Many non-Christians dismiss their need for God because they don't see how Jesus is relevant to their daily life. **But, they can't disagree with your story.** No one can... *it's your story!* When a non-Christian hears about your journey with God, it immediately proves that God is real and alive in your life. Please understand this... **no one can deny your story.**

What if I don't have anything interesting to share?

If you're a Christian now, that means there was a time in your life when you weren't (no one is "born" a Christian). So how did you get from there (non-Christian; far from God; a life without Christ) to here (Christian: a life with Christ)?

It doesn't have to be a wild, sex-filled, drug-induced incredible story. Some people have those stories, but most don't. Most people come to know Christ through a process of asking questions, getting answers, watching other Christians, and accepting God's free gift of forgiveness and eternal life. Nothing extravagant . . . *but genuine and real.* Maybe you don't have a story that will make someone cry or stand to their feet to applaud, but if you know Jesus, your story will encourage someone else's faith journey.

Or maybe you grew up in a Christian home and can't remember a time when you didn't believe. Talk to your family and have them help you identify the period in time when you realized you wanted something more than church and/or religion, a time when you wanted a real relationship with God.

Maybe even more important than a “when” is a “what”...what is God doing in your life today? The Christian faith isn't a one-time event. It's an ongoing relationship with the God of the universe. So, what are you learning? What are you going through? What's the condition of your heart? What has God taught you through some recent challenges? Keep in mind that great stories aren't always success stories.

The next section describes what direction you might take when considering how you'll put your story together. But before you go ahead, take a few minutes to write down any thoughts and/or questions that are floating in your head right now.

Step 2: You CHOOSE which story to tell

THE STORY OF HOW YOU MET CHRIST OR A RECENT GROWTH STORY

So you're willing to tell your story? Great! Which one? You only have one salvation story (a time when you said "yes" to God), but I bet you've got several (at least a few) stories that expose times of growth in your Christian life, or even times of pain that have raised questions and fears. Because it's your story, it can be about a search you're on or a question you're asking God to answer.

Chances are, if you're a new Christian (two years or less) **you've got a salvation story** that is fresh and that you could get excited to share. But, I bet God has been teaching you lots of stuff recently that you could probably share, too. I can also guess that you've got some questions that you're asking. Another option would be to share those questions in your testimony and conclude by asking for prayer.

Possibly, if you've been a Christian for more than two years, your salvation story might be a bit rusty. If so you'll have to do some reflecting and shake the cobwebs off those early days when you said "yes" in your heart to God. But you're probably loaded with recent examples of different challenges God has helped you through and what he's taught you through those. You've probably also seen enough of life to realize that Jesus never promised to solve all your problems. But He is with you through them all. Maybe you could tell about how you drew closer to God through an ongoing challenge. Maybe you could share **a growth story**.

Which way do I go?

Before you share your testimony, you should decide (or discuss with the person who is asking you to share) whether you're going to tell about when you became a Christian (a meeting Christ story) or about something that God has been teaching you lately (a recent growth story). It all depends on what you want to accomplish. Both kinds are valuable.

Take a look at the list of possible benefits for each type of story:

Salvation Story	Growth Story
How you became a Christian.	What God has been teaching you lately.
Gives hope to non-Christians (shows them God cares for everyone)	Shows non-Christians that God is real and personal to you (He's still alive and at work today)
Encourages Christians (reminds them of their own salvation)	Motivates Christians (reminds them that God cares about all the details of life)
Reminds you of God's goodness (everyone needs a reminder of this)	Holds you accountable (encourages you to "walk the talk")
Gives the "big picture" of your life (includes your life before meeting Christ and after)	Gives a "snapshot" of your life (this is what's happening now)
	Shows a realistic side to the Christian faith (reveals the bumps and bruises all Christians experience)

There are probably many other benefits of each, and some of the benefits listed could be in both categories. The important thing is to decide what kind of testimony you want to focus on. Could you combine a salvation story and growth story when sharing your testimony? Yes, it's possible. But, because time is often a factor (an average testimony is usually 3-5 minutes), it's best to pick one in order to stay focused.

Think about it and pray about it. Then, decide if you want to share your salvation story or a growth story.

Check This Out!

Did you know the Apostle Paul used both kinds of stories? Salvation and growth stories are throughout the Bible, but here's a couple to check out from Paul's life.

Salvation Story: 1 Timothy 1

- Before** I once did everything possible to destroy Christ (v. 12, 13).
How I believed God when he offered forgiveness (v. 14-16).
After I'm thanking God and encouraging others to live for Him (v. 17-19).
-

Growth Story: Philippians 3

- Issue** I was full of pride (v. 4-6).
Lesson I learned that knowing Christ is worth far more than anything else (v. 7-9).
Response I'm focusing on my new life with Christ (v. 10-14).

Step 3: You take time to PREPARE

SOME QUESTIONS TO GET YOU THINKING

First of all, let me say that this is not the ONLY way to prepare a testimony, but this is one way that works. What I like about this chronological method is that it takes you through a progression that not only helps you remember all the details but also keeps your listener interested.

The format for a salvation story might go as follows . . .

BEFORE + HOW + AFTER = my salvation story

You want to share what you were like **BEFORE** you met Christ. What issues did you wrestle with? What were your thoughts about Christians, God, and church? What were you doing with your life? In which direction were you headed? How did you feel?

Then you want to tell **HOW** you met Christ. What was said? Who told you about Jesus? Where were you? What were you thinking? How were you feeling? What did you say or pray? This part is critical because non-Christians need to know that it's simple to develop a relationship with Christ. They need to realize that they don't have to have money, a church membership, a perfect past, or a dress code in order to put their trust in Christ.

Finally, you want to tell what your life has been like **AFTER** trusting Christ to be the Lord of your life. Be honest! Don't think you have to make your life look neat and pretty. You won't hurt Jesus' reputation if you admit that you still have struggles. Even in the midst of your struggles, Jesus can teach you incredible things, so share what you've learned and where you hope to be as you follow Jesus every day.

The format for a growth story might look like this . . .

ISSUE + LESSON + RESPONSE = my growth story

What **ISSUE or QUESTION** have you been struggling with? What's been going on in your life that God is using to challenge or stretch you? In what ways have you been stumbling in your walk with Christ?

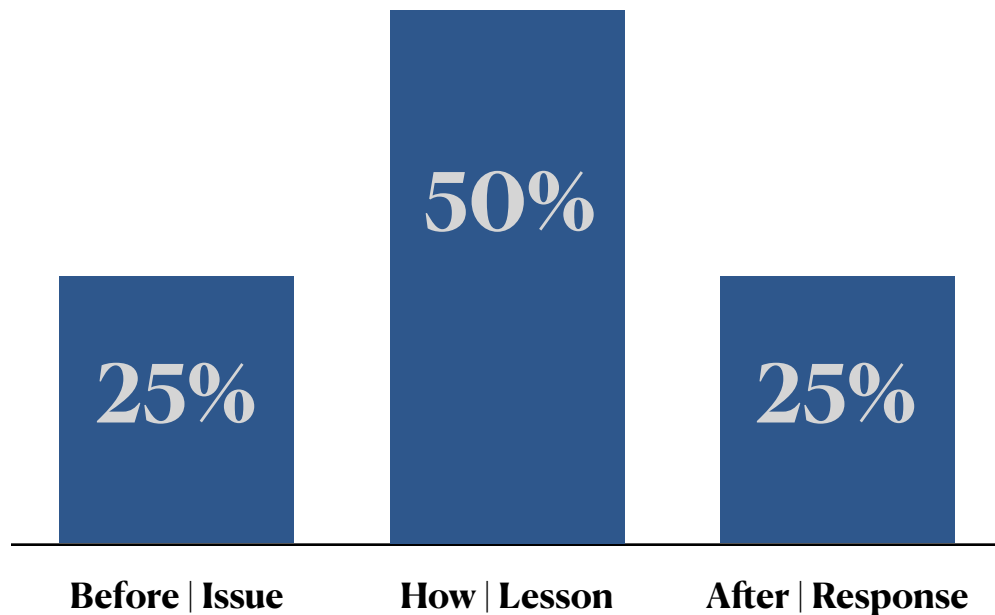
What **LESSON** did you learn from your issue/question? What insight from the Bible did God give you, or what friend encouraged you? What have you learned or in what way have you grown since the issue/question first presented itself?

What **RESPONSE** is God calling for? Or what **RESPONSE** do you need from your listeners? If there was a definite lesson God taught you, how does He want you to live now? If there hasn't been an answer yet, how do you want others to pray for you? Could your response challenge others to grow?

IMPORTANT! When you actually begin to write out either type of testimony, put the bulk of your material in the middle section (“how” or “lesson”).

Why? Many people focus too much on what life was like before Christ or on the issue they’re struggling with, and it can overwhelm the audience. The listener needs to hear HOW you came to know Christ and/or what LESSON God taught you during this time. Everyone can relate to life outside of Christ, but people need to get a clear picture of the kind of hope Christ offers.

So, let’s get practical. Try to have 50% of your story focus on the middle section (“how” or “lesson”) with the remaining 50% split between the other two sections.



Think about it . . .

The next page has some statements to get you thinking. Use them to prompt your writing. Each section should be a paragraph (with the middle section being the longest). The statements are only there to guide you, so don’t feel limited to them. Different statements are given for each type of testimony (salvation or growth) but feel free to pick and choose from both lists. Even though it’s best to choose one type of testimony for a focus, most of the questions can work for either a salvation or growth story.

For more help, see the detailed worksheets on pages 15 and following.

Salvation Story

BEFORE + HOW + AFTER = my Salvation Story

Before

- tell how you thought, acted, and felt
- describe what you put your faith in or what you trusted for security (friends, money, career, family, dating relationships, school, activity, sex, sports, etc.)
- share what you thought about God, the Bible, and Christians
- tell what hope you had for the future

How

- describe how you got to the point at which you knew you needed Jesus
- who told you about Jesus? under what conditions? how long did it take you to make a decision to trust Christ?
- share what you did or said in order to trust Christ (this is important because many people have misconceptions)
- detail your immediate thoughts after putting your faith in Jesus Christ

After

- explain what your first days and months were like as a new Christian and what your life is like now
- what questions have been answered for you? what questions remain?
- have you reached out to anyone since becoming a Christian? how do you now feel about God, the Bible, church, and other Christians?
- what are the biggest differences in your life now that you're a Christian? biggest joys? biggest fears?

Growth Story

ISSUE + LESSON + RESPONSE = my growth story

Issue / Question

- tell what question or life issue was nagging at you and why
- share how the issue/question affected you, your walk with God, other relationships, involvement in other activities, etc.

Lesson

- tell about the process you went through to deal with the issue/question
- describe who helped you during that time (friend, family member, pastor, Bible, etc.)
- describe the conclusion you came to
- share what you've learned through the process about yourself, God, others, the church, etc.

Response

- share your current plan to continue moving forward in your walk with Christ
- share whether or not you feel equipped to help others with similar struggles/questions
- tell about your biggest surprise (good or bad) during the lesson
- tell how others might be able to care for you

Step 4: You use your opportunity to SHARE and REVEAL your story!

TIPS ON TELLING YOUR STORY

You're almost ready! Before you dive in, let me share several quick tips that may help your preparation and enhance your presentation.

Pray

This is obvious but we can get so consumed in the task of writing and figuring out our testimony that we forget to do what is essential!

Invite others to pray

Don't do this alone. Recruit at least three people who will pray for you before and during; try to include at least one adult on this prayer team.

Do a heart check

Are you ready to publicly represent Christ? Be sure your heart is right with God and others. Anyone you need to talk to? Apologize to?

Know your audience

Are you speaking to mostly Christians, non-Christians, or a mix? Be sure to use language that your listeners will understand. Avoid church lingo like "saved," "re-dedicate," "invite Jesus in your heart." What do those words really mean, especially to a non-Christian? (See the chart on the next page for more help and/or ideas.)

Write it out

Not only will this help you get your thoughts together, but it will enable you to begin remembering your story. Plus, if you completely forget everything – including your name – it's right in front of you. Also, be sure to type it out in a large font so that it's easier to read.

Get feedback

Before you present your story publicly, be sure to show it to someone to get his/her thoughts and feelings. Be open to comments so your testimony can be as clear and effective as possible!

Practice

Read it out loud AT LEAST 3 times. Trust me.

Keep it short: 3-5 minutes

Always leave people wanting more. Also, your testimony may be one piece of a bigger teaching presentation, so be clear and concise.

Ignore doubts

Expect your mind to be filled with lots of doubts and messages like, “Who do you think you are to share your story? You're such a hypocrite. God can't use you.” This is a strategy of Satan. Fortunately, as a Christian, you don't have to be perfect to share your story (no one is perfect!). But you do need to know that God is with you and is cheering you on. And so are the people who are praying for you.

Keep your focus on God

Remember, it's God who has given you a story to tell. Be excited about your story, but be sure to give God the credit He deserves.

Have fun!

You are loved by God and your friends no matter how you do, so relax and enjoy the privilege of telling others about the incredible relationship you have (and they can have) with Jesus.

Now What?

1. Write it out.

After you've decided what kind of testimony (salvation story or growth story) you'd like to give, you can use one of the following worksheets to help you prepare.

2. Show it to someone.

Get some feedback. Does it make sense? What ideas might be helpful? Be quick to listen, but don't feel like you need to include all suggestions. Remember, it's your story.

3. Share it.

Remember the tips listed above, especially to have fun!

Watch Your Language!

Below is some common lingo that we use as Christians...but these words don't mean a thing to people outside of the church. (Actually, many of us Christians are guilty of using these words/expressions without really knowing what they mean!) Avoid the lingo and think of an alternative way to communicate what you're trying to say.

Christian Lingo	Possible Alternative
Saved/born again	Became a Christian
Re-dedicated	Got a fresh start; started over
Invite Jesus in your heart	Ask Jesus to be in charge of my life
Sin	Disobeyed; rebelled against God's way
Repent	Go a new direction; turn toward God
God's Word	The Bible
Fellowship	Connect with other Christians
Washed by the blood	God forgave me
Grace	Getting what I don't deserve; a gift
Lost	Far from God

Salvation Story Worksheet

Complete the sentences below to begin constructing your testimony. And use the worksheet to help you write out your testimony on a blank piece of paper. You DO NOT have to use every sentence in your testimony. **This is a guide, not a form.** Which sentences truly capture your heart? Which ones present the best picture of your story?

BEFORE + HOW + AFTER = my salvation story

Before

Hi, my name is _____, and this is my story of how I came to know Jesus.

Before I met Jesus I felt that I _____ .

(Share what was missing in your life. What deep need did you have that you tried to fill before you knew Jesus? Possible examples include lack of peace, fear of death, loneliness, no purpose in life, no real friends, desire to be in control, desire to be center of attention, lots of questions, etc.)

The important things in life for me were _____ .

(Share what your life revolved around and how those seemed to give you happiness and security. Possible examples include career, family, drugs/alcohol, sports, school, friends, sex, relationships, money, work, etc.)

When people asked me about Christians, God, and the Bible, I _____ .

(Share what your thoughts were about Christians, God, and the Bible and why you felt that way. Did you have certain questions about God?)

As a result, my view of life after death and the future was _____ .

(Tell how you felt about the future and if you had any fears.)

How

But then I met/heard/got invited to _____ .

(Who told you about Jesus? Under what conditions?)

I heard _____ .

*(What Bible verse/story/incident first opened your heart to Christ?
What helped you begin to see that God was real?)*

I then realized that I _____ .

(Describe how you got to the place where you knew you needed Jesus. What fears did you have? Any lingering questions? What did you do?)

In order to become a Christian I _____ .

(Detail what you did or said in order to accept Christ—this is important because many people have misconceptions.)

After

Now that I've become a Christian I _____ .

(Share what this means to you. What questions have been answered? What fears have been taken away?)

When I think about God I _____ .

(How do you now feel about God, the Bible, church, other Christians?)

Some of the questions I still have are _____ .

(Be honest. What concerns or fears do you still have?)

But now I can look forward to the future because _____ .

(How do you feel about the future? What plans do you have? Who do you want to tell about Jesus?)

REMEMBER: This worksheet is a **guide** to help you write your story. Don't feel like you have to follow it exactly... In fact, **don't** follow it exactly. Use what helps you communicate your story, and write it out in your own words.

Growth Story Worksheet

Complete the sentences below to begin constructing your testimony. And use the worksheet to help you write out your testimony on a blank piece of paper. You DO NOT have to use every sentence in your testimony. This is a guide, not a form. Which sentences truly capture your heart? Which ones present the best picture of your story?

ISSUE + LESSON + RESPONSE = my growth story

Issue / Question

Hi, my name is _____, and this is my story of what God has been teaching me lately.

Recently I _____.

(Tell what question or life issue has been nagging at you or what you've been struggling with.)

Because of this I've been _____.

(Share how the issue/question has affected you, other relationships, other activities, etc.)

And, as a result, my time with God has been _____.

(Has the issue/question affected your walk with God positively or negatively? Share how.)

Lesson

But then I heard/read/learned/saw _____.

(What were the first steps toward dealing with the issue/question?)

A big help during this time was _____.

(Tell who helped you and what Bible verse/story/incident got your attention.)

As a result _____.

(Describe what conclusion you came to as well as any commitments you made.)

Some of the things I learned were _____.

(Detail what you learned about yourself, God, the Bible, others, etc.)

Response

Based on what I've learned I _____ .

(Share your current strategy and game plan.)

As a result I _____ .

(Tell whether or not you feel equipped to help others with similar issues/questions.)

One of the biggest surprises through this process was _____ .

(Tell about your biggest surprise during the lesson, and whether it was good or bad.)

I'd love it if you'd pray that I _____ .

(Share how others can pray for you.)

REMEMBER: This worksheet is a **guide** to help you write your story. Don't feel like you have to follow it exactly... In fact, **don't** follow it exactly. Use what helps you communicate your story, and write it out in your own words.

Salvation Story Sample

This is just an example. While it's not a PERFECT testimony, it is a good one, as it's been through many drafts. But don't be intimidated. Read it for an idea, listen to the samples of real testimonies on the audio tape provided, and then go for it yourself!

BEFORE + HOW + AFTER = my salvation story

Before

My life was directed by a need to be loved and wanted. I was certain that being cared for by another would give me happiness and purpose in life. When I was at home I lived for my mom and dad's purposes. When I was away from home, I lived for the pursuit of peace through partying, immoral relationships, and good grades. I was making a mess out of what was once a halfway decent life.

How

Then I heard a message at church that caught my attention. A friend whom I respected invited me to his church for a night of fun and a message. He promised me the message would be easy to understand and not "preachy." Little did I know that God would use what I heard that night to change my life forever.

The speaker asked two questions that really made me think about my life. The first question was: "Who is your God?" And the second question was: "What is motivating your life?" As I thought about these two questions, I realized that I was my own god because I was always thinking about me and how to please myself. I was driving my own life, and it wasn't going anywhere that I really liked. I didn't even know where I was going (which is kind of an essential element of driving).

I knew I had done some things wrong in my life and, even though those things weren't major, the speaker read from the Bible that those things would keep me separated from God forever. That forever part was a biggie.

I learned that I was right to pursue love, peace, and a purpose for my life. But I was wrong to think that a human could totally provide all that I desperately wanted. That's when I discovered that it was Jesus Christ who could provide what I needed. And the fact that blew me away was hearing that God actually wanted to provide me love, peace, and purpose beyond my wildest dreams.

I learned that Jesus' death on the cross paid the penalty for my wrongdoings. And it was to Christ's control that I needed to turn my life over. Finally, I realized I was unable to achieve peace on my own, so I spoke to God in a simple but sincere prayer and said: "God, if you're really God and if Jesus is real, and you want to love me the way that the speaker described...then...I want that. Please come into my life and take charge of it."

After

Well, He did! And now I know I have value because God made me. I still may not know every step of my life in advance, but I can trust the One who made me, because He does know those steps. I've learned over the past few years that life goes best when I trust God 100%. Although I don't always have the faith to do this, I have experienced the love I so desperately wanted. And if you've never experienced that love I'd be happy to tell you more about it later tonight. Thanks for listening.

CONGRATS!

You made it to the end of this testimony tool!

Whether you've already wrestled through the process or are just catching your breath before you take the plunge, I want to again CONGRATULATE you on being willing to prepare and then tell your story. When you're done, you'll be glad you took the time to do it. Plus, as God adds new chapters to your life, you'll be confident to share the new lessons as well as helpful to someone in prompting them to tell their story. Way to go!