

Merimnao

Writing a Testimony – Guidelines

Within Merimnao we encourage every leader, volunteer and participant to write out and give their testimony in a public forum. Leaders are required to do this before they are allowed to lead within the ministry; the reasoning behind this can be found in our guidelines for leadership. This guideline to writing a testimony has been written to assist any person in preparing their written Christian testimony.

What is a Testimony?

There are many definitions of what a testimony is; for the purpose of this guideline we are going to use the following common definition:

- Evidence given by a witness under oath.

Within Merimnao, and the same would apply to any Christian setting, the evidence is a person's life story, the witness is the writer and giver of the testimony and the oath is the implied promise to God and all present that what is being said is the truth.

The Scriptural Basis for a Testimony

Giving a testimony within a church or ministry setting is different from giving testimony in a court or some other forum. In a Christian setting a testimony is basically about personal confession, in a court setting it is about informing others of what you saw or know to be true with respect to other people or situations. In this part of these guidelines we are only concerned about what God's word says about why we ought to give our testimony.

There are four important scriptural reasons for giving a personal testimony, these are:

Confession of Jesus

Matt 10:32 – “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.” NASU

These are the words of Jesus, who clearly states that we are to confess Him before men. In a personal testimony, we speak publicly about what Jesus has done in our lives; this is confessing Him before men.

Coming Out of Darkness

John 3:20-21 – “Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” NIV

Speaking of our past and all its secrets, is living in the truth, and as Jesus puts it in this scripture, living in the light. It is part of our personal healing and spiritual growth to speak the truth out loud about ourselves. We are to speak the truth about all the things we have done, and all the things that have been done to us, so that we can remove unnecessary fear from our lives. When we choose to give our full personal testimony we are choosing God’s way, we are not allowing the darkness of our past to continue to run our lives.

It is Evidence of God’s Power in Our Lives

2 Tim 1:7 - For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. NASU

When we are unwilling to give a personal testimony, in appropriate situations, we are denying that this scripture is true; thereby denying God. Conversely, when we choose to give a testimony, we are relying on God’s power in three ways. First, we relying on Him to help us prepare it, next we are relying on Him to give us the faith to overcome our secrets, and last we are relying on Him to give us courage to speak it.

It is True Worship

John 4:23-24 – “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” NASU

In these words, spoken by Jesus, we see that He is helping us understand that true worship involves worshipping Him in “spirit and truth”. As we speak the truth about our lives from the depths of our heart, we are doing exactly what Jesus described in these verses of scripture. It is true worship to give a Christian personal testimony; it is the truth about our lives, which have been redeemed by Jesus, spoken to give glory to God.

These four aspects of giving a Christian testimony assist a person on focusing their minds on becoming free of “self”, with all its imperfections, baggage and dark secrets, and honoring God with their public spoken words.

Barriers to Writing a Testimony

As one might expect there are several barriers to writing a testimony that are commonly experienced. Let’s look at some of the most frequent:

Spiritual Barriers

Christians have three identifiable spiritual enemies. These are; our adversary and his followers, the world system and our own sin nature. Each of these will work against a person who is trying to prepare a testimony.

The adversary will conduct a spiritual battle against a Christian writing a testimony as he knows that the preparation and giving of it is a step of freedom from darkness and into the light. He also knows that it will draw a person closer to God due to the realization that God has always been there for us, in both the good and bad times.

The world system is a little more difficult to see. In the giving of a testimony we are to be accurate and truthful. Our culture preaches a message of “only show us your virtues”, and if we listen to that we will be tempted to not include important and relevant items.

Our own sin nature, sometimes called “self”, is the biggest spiritual barrier to writing a thorough testimony. “Self” is always present, wherever we go! We all have sinful tendencies, some of which might become more pronounced when we are asked, or choose, to write a testimony. Some of things that come out in us are perfectionism, laziness, disobedience, pride and contempt. Each person is unique in this issue.

Denial

There are two important aspects to this barrier that could affect a writer. The most important is the denial of things that occurred in our lives. We often minimize events or relationship dysfunctions. The second aspect of denial is that we sometimes believe the lie that we don't need to write the testimony. There is a variation of that which says we don't need to be thorough or completely truthful. Always remember that denial is a self-deception, or a lie that we tell ourselves, which is what makes it so dangerous.

Fear

There is often a great deal of fear that surrounds the preparing and giving of a testimony. Some of the common fears are:

- Fear of exposure, which leads to feelings of shame.
- Fear of rejection, which leads to feelings of worthlessness.
- Fear of failure, which leads to feelings of inadequacy.

The feelings that rise up through these very normal fears were created by God to direct us to go to Him for peace and rest. During such a time or moment of fear it is often appropriate to go to His word for comfort. Philippians 4:6-7 is particularly valuable:

Phil 4:6-7 - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. NASU

Pride

Believe it or not, sometimes people are prideful of some parts of their lives. The danger here is that we will try to make ourselves look like something we are not. Trusted godly advisors will help us answer the question, "Have I been prideful in my testimony?"

Perfectionism

Some of us have a tendency to try to make our testimony sound perfect, meaning that it is written in perfect prose, and with perfect grammar in a perfect style. It is

futile to try to make it perfect, because none of us can do it. We are called by God to do things well. Perfectionism is bondage, excellence is the target.

Don't let any of these barriers stop you from writing the truth about your life and God's work in you. When you struggle with the preparation of your testimony, and you will, you may have to just move forward even though it is tough, it is a choice that only you can make.

The Elements of a Testimony

There are many ways to write out a personal testimony, and it is important to write your own story in your own style. In this section of this guide we are going to look at some elements, or facets of a person's life, to include in what they may write. We must always ask ourselves if any particular element is relevant to our story or not.

Initial Summary

Some testimonies include a one or two sentence summary telling the listener or reader a short description of what they are about to hear. This is often added **after** the testimony is prepared in a draft form.

Family History

This is often a good place to start a testimony. Our story is almost always heavily influenced by what happened within our family of origin. Here is a list of possible significant influences on a person's story.

- Generational patterns.
- Geographical factors, such as family dispersal and migration.
- Family economics, job losses or changes.
- Losses of close relatives, such as grandparents, parents or siblings.
- Parental relationship, including separation, divorce and step parents.
- Compulsive behaviors and addictions in close family members.
- Religious aspects of family life.

Within the element of "family history" we only consider situations, events, people or relationships that have been an influence on us and have relevance to our story.

Personal History

In this element we look at how our lives have progressed, and in a Christian testimony we would normally break this into two sections. Life before we accepted Christ; and life after we became a Christ follower. In our personal history we are attempting to describe a personal inventory of our lives. Such an inventory might include:

- How we related to our family members.
- The behaviors we engaged in as a child, adolescent, and young adult.
- How schools and college experiences affected us.
- How we interacted with society and culture.
- Early marriage choices and behaviors, and how they determined what our new “family of origin” looks like today.
- What or who influenced us to accept Christ as our personal savior.
- Personal dysfunctions and how they have steered us through life.
- Personal medical or health issues.
- Our children, and their lives.

Again, in preparing our testimony we must stick to relevant information about our personal life.

Spiritual Factors

Within this element we want to look at the spiritual side of our life, and weave it into our personal and family history where it is important. Some of the things to consider are:

- Family spiritual traditions.
- In what religion or denomination were we raised?
- Looking back, can you see God working in your life?
- Who or what was God to us as a child, adolescent and young adult?
- When were we first introduced to Christ as we know Him today?
- What caused us to come to Christ?
- What does Scripture mean to you, and do you have some favorites?
- Where is Christ working in your life today?
- How did you come to be at your current church?

In this element we are trying to thread the truth of Christ working in our life throughout the testimony.

Current Situation

This element is a simple look at where we are today in our life. It takes everything we have been speaking about and crystallizes in down to a few sentences or a couple of paragraphs. Don't be too rigid about this; it can be longer if it is relevant information. This information would tend to be toward the end of a testimony.

Where Are You Going?

In this last element a person is going to talk about some of the following:

- Where they believe God is taking them in their Christian walk.
- What God has been doing to prepare them for this next part of their personal spiritual journey.
- What they believe their personal calling is.
- How has, or is, God equipping them to meet His call.
- What concrete steps they are going to take over the next few months to answer God's call.
- Where does your current church and church family fit in?

For some individuals there may not be a sense of a calling or an imperative direction. It may be that God wants them to continue to work out their "salvation with fear and trembling." (Ph 2:12-13) This is normal and to be expected as God works in an individual sometimes to prepare them before He makes their calling obvious.

Preparing to Write a Testimony

There are some actions we can take before we sit down to actually write out our testimony. This is a list of some that are helpful.

Prayer

This is probably best done before a person even sits down to start. Find a quiet place and tell God what you are planning to do, which He knows of course! A person might want to ask Him to be a part of it, and for His guidance in what to

say, what to include, what to leave out and what to emphasize. Ask how He wants to be glorified through your words.

Meditation

Spend time in deep thought and openness to God over your testimony. Go to a quiet place with a notepad and write down the things that come to mind. A person might want to do this a few times.

Consult

Sit down with a couple of trusted friends, people who know you reasonably well and who would give you godly advice and counsel. Speak to them about what you are doing, and ask for their input. Take your notepad! Ask for their permission to consult with them through the process of writing out the testimony. Go through the finalized draft testimony with them before you plan to give it in a public forum.

It honors your trusted friends to part of such an important spiritual event in your life. It also honors and glorifies God because His word recommends that we consult others. This makes consulting others an act of acknowledgement of God's superior wisdom over our own. (Pr 15:22)

Sketch It Out

Frame out the testimony, much like a home is framed out before it is built. Start to put the pieces in place, looking at what sequences the life events need to be told. See if they follow your life's timeline chronologically, or if they need to from a listener's perspective.

Select Scriptures

Start to pick out scriptures that are meaningful to you and your story. Your trusted godly friends might be able to help. As a rule of thumb, use up to one scripture per page of typewritten testimony. Remember this is only a guide, not an absolute rule. There are a couple of don'ts here though:

1. Don't use too many scriptures. There are two major problems with this. The first is that it makes a person look like they are hiding behind God's word, making the testimony sound insincere. The second is that it can look like an attempt to show how spiritual a person is, this is pride at work.

2. Don't use too few or no scriptures. In the life of a person relying on Christ, His word will always carry significance. Not demonstrating this in a Christian testimony indicates that God's word doesn't carry that significance.

When a person is in a preparation phase of writing a testimony it is wise to include all the possibilities on a list, then make a final selection as the testimony is finalized. It is recommended that the "list of possibilities" is actually fully written out, as this tends to make the words of scripture more alive to us in a personal way.

Writing the Testimony

With good preparation this part, the actual writing, will be easier than one might think. There are some pointers that might be helpful though:

1. Be yourself, this is your personal testimony; stamp your personality on it.
2. Write it as you would speak. If you like to use humor in your normal speech patterns, use it in the testimony. If you are more serious, be serious.
3. Don't concern yourself with style; content is much more important.
4. When finished, expect it to be between 6 and 10 typed pages of 14 pitch type size. Shorter means you may not have included enough of your life and much longer would mean you may be overdoing some things.
5. Don't write it all at once. Take a few days or even a couple of weeks. Try to do it in a continuous time frame though, to maintain the emotional link you have with your own story. Taking too long a break between moments of writing will mean you will have to go back to the beginning to pick up the thread.
6. As you write, try to get a sense of what you are feeling. This might help with words or phrases when you want to convey things. An example might be; if you grew up with an alcoholic parent, how did you feel about him or her back then, and how do you feel toward them now?
7. Avoid using "overly spiritual" language. For example used "rescued" or "freed" instead of "saved." Your Christian friends can help with this.
8. Stay specific and be truthful. Admit your weaknesses and proclaim your strengths. Don't deny either of them!
9. Talk about your problems and your victories. Show how God helped you through your personal crises and developed your character through them.
10. Try to end the testimony with your personal message of hope for, or in, the future. It could be hope in where you think God is taking you on your

spiritual journey, or hope in the work or ministry you believe God has given you. Whatever it is, make it personal to only you.

Last Things

Here are a few thoughts to remember as you begin to prepare yourself for writing and giving your testimony.

It is yours!

Your testimony is yours! Nobody else can write it or speak it. You are the only person who has lived your life, and so only you can verbalize and combine all that has happened in your life.

It is a Growth Step.

The writing and public giving is a step of spiritual growth in any person's life. It increases the honesty and transparency in your life, which is always a step toward God.

It is a Spiritual Marker.

A spiritual marker is a moment in time when a significant spiritual event takes place in the life of a believer. The day you give your full public testimony is such an event. Make sure you write this date in the front of your favorite Bible. Within the Merimnao ministry we give the individual the choice of having the testimony recorded for their personal use. This recording can also be thought of as part of creating a personal spiritual marker.

Other's Want to Hear it.

Other people do want to get to know you better. A full testimony is a great way of allowing other people to see the "real you". They have a window into your life, and through that window they will be able to connect with you in some way.

God is Glorified!

Perhaps the most important thought to remember about giving your personal Christian testimony is that God is glorified in the preparation and public speaking of it.

That seems like a good place to end these guidelines!