

# share your testimony

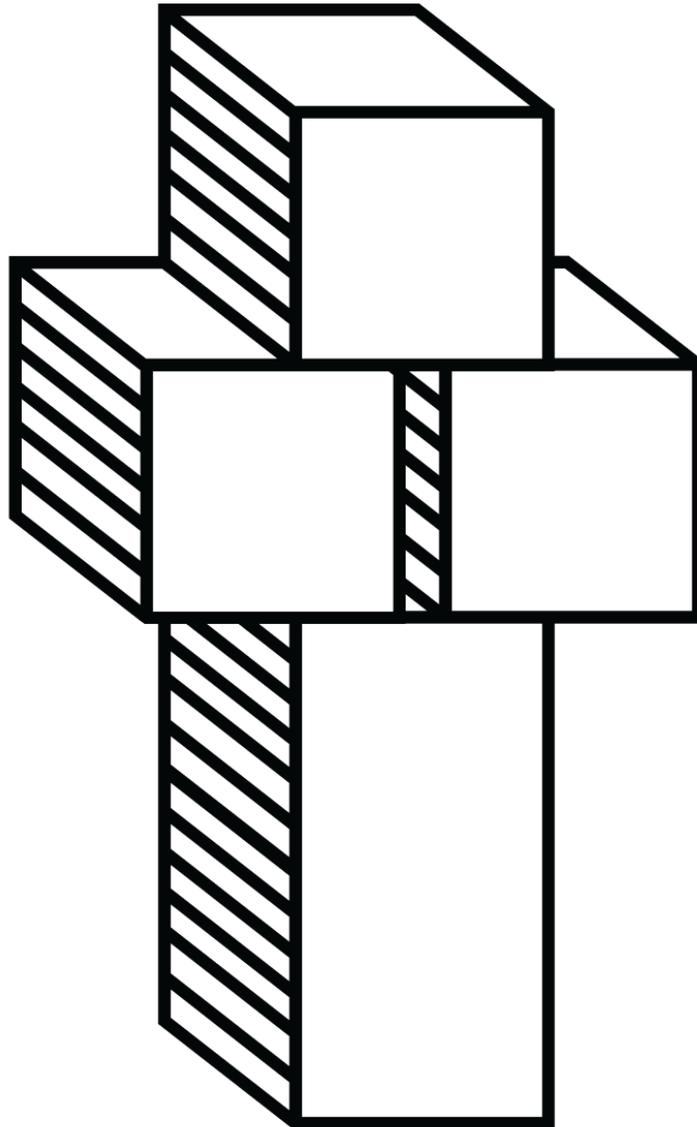
# 05

## goal

To live a testimony rather than a biography and to actively grow in sharing that testimony with the people God has put in our lives.

## participant's packet

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## key passage

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people who are God's own possession. You have become this people so that you may speak of the wonderful acts of the One who called you out of darkness into His amazing light. — **1 Peter 2:9**





# self assessment

I regularly share my testimony.



I actively look for opportunities to tell my story.



I have a clear plan on what to say and how.



My story about Jesus or me or the church/religion.



When people engage me in a spiritual conversation, I can transition to telling my story.



# practice introduction

Everyone has a story. Whether we realize it or not, the way we understand our lives and the world around us is through story. Story shapes how we see God, other people, and ourselves. It forms the basis for how we make decisions. It dictates how we relate to people and how we relate to God. Recognizing the story we are believing about ourselves is important.

One of the ways to look at a story is through the lens of 4 key components. These 4 components mirror our first parents story as the whole biblical narrative:

<b>Origin/Creation</b>	who or what we credit for who we are
<b>Problem/Fall</b>	why things are not the way they are supposed to be
<b>Solution/Redemption</b>	who or what can fix the problem
<b>Hope/Restoration</b>	what the world will look like when the problem is fixed

In our culture, the dominant story is a *biography*. A biography is a story about you and what you have done. In this story, you are the hero, and you fight unbeatable odds to secure a blissful life for yourself. You are rarely portrayed in a negative light, and more often than not, you are the victim of wrong being perpetrated on you. The solution and hope of your story usually involves your innate goodness and hard work shining through for all to see.

However, God has initiated a different story for His people to live in – a *testimony*. A testimony is a story about who God is and what He has done for you. In this story, God is the hero, and He is the one who pursues you and sacrifices greatly to rescue you. The problem in the story is not just the wounds you have received from others, but includes your sin, your disobedience, your rebellion. The solution and hope are God’s mercy, love, and grace towards you *even though you do not deserve it*.

The important question we must ask ourselves is – am I living a biography or a testimony? Am I living in my own story, or am I living in God’s story?

## knowing God's story

God's story is the most accurate assessment of who we are and what our real problem is. It presents the most sure solution and the best possible future hope. God's story is the gospel – the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ that brings great joy to every person who will receive it.

The gospel can be summarized using the same key story components mentioned above:

### **Origin/Creation**

God is the creator of all things, and as such gives meaning and purpose to everything and everyone that exists. God made mankind in His image, which means we were created to image God's. We were designed to worship Him and enjoy Him forever.

### **Problem/the Fall**

Humanity has rebelled against God starting with Adam and Eve until now. We have exchanged worshiping God for worshiping created things. We have made God a supporting actor in our story, instead of the focus and purpose of the story. God has all authority to hold us accountable for rebelling against the purpose for which He created us, and the rightful punishment is death. All death, pain, sickness, and brokenness we experience in our world is a result of mankind's rebellion against a Holy God.

### **Solution/Redemption**

God alone can save us from our broken and rebellious state and the punishment for our sin. Because of His great love for us, God sent His only Son Jesus into the world to take our punishment upon Himself. He did this by living a perfect life (fulfilling God's purpose for mankind), then dying a criminal's death (taking the punishment for our sins), and finally resurrecting from the dead (securing His utter victory over sin, death, and satan for His people). God did not sweep our sin under a "cosmic rug" or decide it "wasn't that bad" – He redeemed us because we were under the curse of sin.

### **Hope/Restoration**

Having received the work Jesus did for us, we will be resurrected like Him and live forever with Him. Jesus will make all things new – restoring all the brokenness and pain caused by sin. His restoration work has already begun as the salvation of the gospel spreads throughout the world through the work of His body – the Church. He gives us purpose as we join Him in the restoration of all things. Even though full restoration will only come when Jesus returns. It is our privilege to show our world glimpses of the kingdom of God, by the way we revel, proclaim, demonstrate and participate in the mercies of God. He will return and bring full and final justice, and restore all things.

## connecting the dots

Living a testimony rather than a biography means connecting the dots between our own personal story and the gospel. When we put our trust in Jesus, the good news of the gospel invades our lives and corrects, completes, and makes sense of our story. We have the privilege and responsibility to **PROCLAIM**. To declare what God has done, not what we did or are doing. We move from living a biography to living a testimony. Let's reflect on how your own story connects to the gospel story. Here are some questions that can help:

<b>Origin</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who (or what) am I giving credit to when I think about what makes me who I am?</li><li>• Do I recognize how God was at work in and through all the people and circumstances that shaped me?</li><li>• When I think about the purpose I was made for, is it my own purpose or is it God's purpose for me?</li></ul>
<b>Problem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When I think about the problems, pain, and challenges I've faced, is it all external circumstances? People that have hurt and wounded me.</li><li>• Do I see that my biggest problem is my own sin and desire for autonomy?</li><li>• Do I acknowledge that I've run away from God's purposes to pursue my own desires and to try and heal my own pain?</li><li>• Do I recognize that I cannot do anything to atone God for my own sins and that atonement IS necessary?</li></ul>
<b>Solution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Am I the hero of my story or is Jesus?</li><li>• Do I point to the ways I've cleaned up my life (gone to church, made good decisions, etc...) or do I point to Jesus' saving work alone?</li><li>• Do I see that all the ways that I've changed as the work of the Holy Spirit and not my own doing?</li><li>• Do I live with a sense of privilege and responsibility as a child of God, and not just a tolerated forgiven sinner?</li></ul>
<b>Hope</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When I think about hope, is it only in terms of this life or do I hope for eternal life with Jesus?</li><li>• Do I see that the work God is doing right now in and through me is eternal and not temporary?</li><li>• Do I see how God is using me to bring restoration to a broken world?</li><li>• Do I make decisions on the basis of eternity?</li></ul>

We are called to REVEL in the goodness we have received from God so that we can PROCLAIM the beauty of the One who called us out of darkness into the light. PLEASE remember that the goal is NOT to get good at a method. If you regularly share your story and it doesn't fit this model, great! The purpose of this model is to challenge us to share our story. This is one way we can do it, the key is, let's do it!







## barriers to telling your story

We are called to **proclaim** the mercy of God. That means *sharing it with others*. When we experience something amazing in life, we don't keep it to ourselves – we tell people about it! When we find a cool new restaurant, we tell people about our experience and tell them to go. When we hear great music, we tell people to go to that concert. Yet, for many Christians, when we experience Jesus' saving and on-going work in our lives, we find ourselves reluctant to tell people about Him. Why? Here are a few possible reasons:

- 1) **We feel unqualified to lead people to Jesus.** We can put unrealistic expectations on ourselves thinking we must have all the right air-tight arguments to make a case for Jesus. However, Jesus did not call us to be His lawyers, He called us to be His *witnesses* (the great commission – Acts 1:8). A witness simply tells what they've seen and heard. A witness *tells their story*. The woman that Jesus met at the well immediately witnessed to her entire community, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (John 4:29 ESV).
- 2) **We're afraid of the awkward tension caused by talking about God.** We are conditioned to keep God absent from our conversations. We fear what people will think and the awkwardness it can create in ongoing relationships. In fact, Barna Research shows that nearly half of millennials who identify as Christians think that sharing your faith with the hope of changing someone's beliefs is wrong<sup>1</sup>. Sharing our faith is a battle against the culture, however, people are also far more open to talking about God than our fears believe! Barna research also shows that: " **Nearly half of U.S. adults (44%)** say they are more open to God today than before the pandemic." Sharing what Jesus has done (and is doing) in our lives is part of being truly *known* by the other person. It is an invitation to deeper friendship. Otherwise we would be hiding the most important thing about who we are.
- 3) **We think our testimony is boring.** We think we need some radical story to make the gospel compelling. However, the gospel doesn't need our help. It has plenty of power to save people by itself (Romans 1:16). The truth is (no matter our story), we have been rescued by the king of the universe – that is pretty radical! Also, if we are letting the gospel do its full work in our lives, then we have a *current* testimony to tell! Every fear, struggle, and challenge we currently face has a gospel testimony about how Jesus is the hero of our story.

- 4) **We think we need to “have it all together” before we can share our testimony.** We disqualify ourselves from sharing our testimony because we know we’re still a work in progress. We’re very aware of our sin. We think evangelizing to unbelievers is reserved for the “super spiritual” Christians who don’t share our same sin struggles. However, this is missing the whole point of the gospel! Our weakness only highlights His strength! In fact, transparency about your current sin in your testimony shows just how free and powerful the forgiveness of Jesus is.

Whatever barriers we face, God has given us all the power we need to overcome them by the Holy Spirit:

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

ACTS 1:8 ESV

We are not alone in the mission of witnessing to our unbelieving friends and neighbors. God has given us the Holy Spirit who empowers us to be both *bold* and *effective* witnesses. He will help us in the moment with words to say (Luke 12:12). He goes before us by working in the hearts of the people we are called to reach. When the early church faced persecution for their witness, they prayed for power to continue to proclaim the good news with boldness, and the place where they were staying was shaken (Acts 4:23–31). We can bring our weakness and fear to God, and He just can’t wait to give us an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to make us bold witnesses (Luke 11:13). Pray for empowerment and clarity before you share.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be witnesses of what He has done for us. We often experience fear and reluctance to step into this call, but He truly has given us all the power we need. We have a story to tell (a testimony) that the world desperately needs to hear.

# practices for week 3

**pray that people in your life would know Jesus.**

Identify 1–3 people in your life that don't know Jesus and write their names below. Take intentional time each day this week to pray for them. Specifically pray that God would make you an empowered witness in their life.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**seek opportunities to tell your story.**

Prayerfully seek opportunities to be a witness this week. Here are some ideas:

- Intentionally build relationships in your workplace this week (e.g. connect with a co-worker over lunch), and ask them to tell you *their* story.
- Pray for specific people to be open to hearing your story.
- Take an opportunity to share your story or a current testimony of where God is active in your life.
- Spend time walking your neighborhood and praying for opportunities to meet neighbors and be a witness to them.



## it all starts with hospitality

*Excerpt by Matt Chandler*

*In all times and places, but perhaps even more so in this current cultural climate, I believe that evangelism almost always starts with hospitality. That might sound strange, especially seeing how this idea of hospitality got hijacked by Martha Stewart and became less about a way we live our lives and more about how we decorate and prepare meals for the seasons. But when you look at the Bible, you see just how serious God is about hospitality—real, genuine, biblical hospitality.*

*Looking at the whole of Scripture, this idea of hospitality is everywhere, and it's usually tied to loving and welcoming those who are considered aliens, strangers and outsiders—anyone outside your circle of friends. It's about opening your life and your home to men and women who don't think like you, look like you or act like you. That's biblical hospitality, and it's all connected to the reality that God is hospitable. Even when we were living as his enemies, God came and saved us. He opened the door and invited us into a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.*

*As we show others the same welcoming love God showed us, we reflect our Creator and model what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God. But it can also create an entry point for living out the Great Commission and evangelizing our neighbors, especially in the age of unbelief. It's not the silver bullet for doing evangelism in the 21st century, and it's our calling regardless, yet I'm convinced that in our cultural context and political landscape, this sort of biblical hospitality will take some folks by surprise and open up the door for opportunities to make disciples.*

# the gospel comes with a house key

*Excerpts from an interview with Rosaria Butterfield*

**When you began your marriage, how did you and your husband develop a vision together for your evangelistic hospitality?**

*First, there is a subtle but important difference between evangelistic hospitality and radically ordinary hospitality. Evangelistic hospitality is done for the needs of the lost. Radically ordinary hospitality is done for the good of everyone—the host included. Evangelistic hospitality burns out when people don't respond to the gospel with saving faith. Radically ordinary hospitality lives out your transparent, authentic faith before the watching world, knowing that too many people are dying of crushing loneliness, both within the church and without, and taking comfort in being both earthly and spiritual good to others. Finally, evangelistic hospitality focuses on saving faith. Radically ordinary hospitality focuses on bearing the image of God. It seeks to simultaneously build up the family of God as it adds and includes those who do not yet know Christ. Now, to your question!*

*Kent and I were both radically converted, and that experience has made us less afraid of people. We remember being outsiders, outcasts, and strangers. We recognize strangers as our kin. When Kent's first pastorate was as a church planter, radically ordinary hospitality was a necessary way of life, as the home of a church planter (or missionary) is the bridge to the church. And some people need to park on the bridge longer than others. From day one of our married life, Kent has been my faithful spiritual head, and we have always fled together to the means of grace to guide us as we open our home and hearts to others.*

**Is "radically ordinary hospitality" something every Christian is called to in every season of life?**

*No. There are seasons of life where such openness would be impossible. When we had just adopted a teenager out of foster care and she was deep in grief and anger, or when my aged mother was dying of cancer, well, during such times our doors were closed, and we were caring for our own. The key word in your question is "season." Seasons are supposed to change. Another key issue is this: radically ordinary hospitality is never convenient. A good question to ask yourself: What is the difference between inconvenient and impossible?*

*Also, practicing radically ordinary hospitality doesn't mean that your home is the place where this happens. Perhaps someone else in the church has a home that is a better fit—perhaps its location is more central or open. (In general, the size of the home is not a barrier to hospitality, but its location may be.) Well, if you go to this sister's house and become a stakeholder in the hospitality that takes place there, you're still practicing hospitality. Host and guest are fluid positions, and radically ordinary hospitality requires many hands, many hosts, many guests, and much grace from God.*

# self re-assessment

I regularly share my testimony.

Never



Always

I actively look for opportunities to tell my story.

Never



Always

I have a clear plan on what to say and how.

Never



Always

My story about Jesus or me or the church/religion.

Biography



Testimony

When people engage me in a spiritual conversation, I can transition to telling my story.

Never



Always

# practices for week 4

**continue praying for people in your life who don't know Jesus.**

Take intentional time each day this week to pray for the 1-3 people you identified last week. Specifically pray that God would make you an empowered witness in their life.

**seek opportunities to tell your story.**

Prayerfully seek opportunities to be a witness this week. Here are some ideas:

- Look for opportunities to pray for people.
- Spend time walking your neighborhood and praying for opportunities to meet neighbors and be a witness to them.
- Invite someone to your (or a friends home) for dinner/game night etc. and ask them to share their story.