

Why I Stopped Sharing My Personal Testimony

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I'll never forget the first time I shared my personal testimony with a non-Christian. When the opportunity arose and I shared my story with an unbelieving friend, she replied, "That's so cool. I'm so happy you found something that works for you."

For me?

"It's not about what works for me," I said, trying to hide my discouragement. "It's about what's true for everyone."

"That doesn't make sense," she responded. "That's your experience, not mine. I had a similar revelation when I realized I could leave the church, and I've become a better person for my decision. Just as you were freed from your heaviest burdens by finding God, I was freed from mine by leaving God behind."

I was devastated but I chalked it up to my friend's hardheartedness. I decided to shake the dust off my feet and look forward to the next opportunity.

Maybe Next Time

But time after time of sharing my testimony resulted in similar responses. People expressed enthusiasm that I was happy, that Christianity worked for me, and that I had "found my niche." Yet no one considered my experience as anything more than just that – my own personal experience.

One dear friend responded, "I've heard stories like that from Christians all my life, so I asked God to give me that same kind of undeniable, divine encounter. But he's never responded. So I figure either God isn't real and you all are out of your minds, or he just doesn't like me very much. Either way, it's clearly not for me."

I was heartbroken and confused. I had been taught that sharing what God had done in my life was the ideal way to witness to non-Christians. A personal testimony was interesting yet non-

confrontational, compelling but inoffensive. And yet, despite having shared my testimony with dozens of unbelievers, not a single person felt challenged to consider the truth claims of Christianity.

Why It Wasn't Working

During that time, I had conversations with Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and even Muslims, whose personal testimonies all sounded uncomfortably similar to mine. God had spoken to their heart, answered their prayers, and had taken care of them in ways too remarkable to be mere coincidence, they all explained. Of course, their stories weren't the slightest bit convincing to me, just as mine hadn't been to them.

I began to realize that what makes a personal testimony inoffensive also makes it largely ineffective. A personal testimony isn't a truth claim, at least not the way most people share it. It doesn't provide evidence for Jesus' life, death, or resurrection. It doesn't offer facts that support the existence of God or an explanation for the problem of evil. It doesn't give reasons why the Bible is historically reliable. A personal testimony is the story of one individual's decision, but it doesn't offer reasonable arguments for others to make that same decision.

So how are we supposed to obey Jesus's command to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20)? **What's the alternative to a personal testimony when we want to share the truth found only in Christ (John 14:6)?** I propose we take our cues from Jesus and the apostles and return to sharing evidence.

Jesus Shared Evidence

When Jesus called his first disciples, he taught truth and provided evidence (miracles) to support his claims, then he asked people to follow him (Luke 5:1-11). In fact, this was his method whenever he went into new regions (see Luke 4:14-44; John 4:7-26). **People decided to follow Jesus not on blind faith or a subjective feeling, but based on the evidence they had seen and heard.**[i]

Jesus also used evidence to assuage the doubts of even those who had been with him a long time. **John the Baptist** was Jesus’ cousin, who leapt in the womb during Mary’s visit (Luke 1:39-45), baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, heard God’s voice from heaven, and saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus in bodily form like a dove (Luke 3:21-22). Yet when John experienced unexpected suffering, he began to doubt.

Jesus didn’t respond as many do today, by insisting that John “just believe” or “have faith” or “prayer harder.” Rather, he responded with more evidence, saying, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” (Matt. 11:2-6).

Similarly, the disciple **Thomas** had traveled with Jesus for three years during his public ministry. Thomas had heard Jesus’s teachings and witnessed his character. He had seen prophecies fulfilled and had witnessed miracles. He had every reason to believe, but when Jesus was executed as a common criminal, Thomas doubted. A bodily resurrection from the dead was just too much to believe.

Thomas said, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe” (John 20:25). So what did Jesus do? He showed Thomas the evidence! Eight days later, when Thomas was with the other disciples, Jesus came to him and said, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John 20:26-27).

After his resurrection, Jesus stayed with the disciples for forty days, eating with them and continuing to prove he was who he claimed to be. And when Jesus ascended into heaven, his disciples

took up the mantle of proclaiming truth in the same way Jesus had – by providing evidence.

The Apostles Shared Evidence

At Pentecost, the apostle Peter offered signs and wonders, fulfilled prophecy, and relayed eyewitness testimony to persuade people from all over the Roman Empire that the most reasonable explanation for what they were seeing was not morning drunkenness, but a risen Messiah (Acts 2:1-41).

On his missionary journeys, the apostle Paul reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that Jesus was the Messiah who needed to suffer and rise from the dead (Acts 17:1-3, 17). And he reasoned with the Gentiles from outside the Scriptures, making a case with their own accepted beliefs to convince them (Acts 17:17-34).

In fact, in describing his mission, Paul told the Philippians, “I am put here for the defense of the gospel” (1:7, 16). This word translated defense is the same word from which we get our English word “**apologetics**,” meaning to make reasoned arguments or to provide evidence as justification. Using this same word, **Peter commanded believers to “always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you”**(1 Pet. 3:15).

When Evidence Is Shared

What happened as a result of all this evidence-based reasoning, explaining, and proving? People were convinced and believed!

After Peter shared evidence for the resurrection at Pentecost, we read, “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). After Paul reasoned and explained his case in the synagogue, “some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women” (Acts 17:4). And after reasoning with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers from outside the Scriptures, “some joined [Paul] and believed” (Acts 17:34).

By the grace of God people were convinced by evidence, and by that same grace, people continue to be convinced by evidence today.

In fact, several of today’s most influential Christians were convinced by studying the evidence. This includes Josh McDowell, Nancy Pearcey, Lee Strobel, J. Warner Wallace, and David Wood. But perhaps my favorite example, and the one that has influenced me the most, is Nabeel Qureshi.

Nabeel was a devout Muslim who began challenging his classmates’ claims for Christianity as early as middle school. His objections went unanswered for years, but in college, he finally met his match in ex-convict-turned-Christian, David Wood. Through years of debate and examination of the evidence, Nabeel eventually became convinced that Christianity is true. He gave his life to Christ and went on to impact countless lives for the gospel through his books and speaking events with Ravi Zacharias Ministries.

A Wealth of Evidence

The evidence available to us today may look a little different than the evidence available in the first century, but there is a wealth of evidence at our disposal.

We are not eyewitnesses to Jesus’s life and resurrection, but we have the accounts of those who were. We don’t typically see miracles, but we have millennia of biblical scholarship and archaeology that provide reasons to believe the accounts are trustworthy. We don’t often hear God speaking audibly or see him parting seas, but we have significant scientific evidence that shows the universe had a beginning, and millennia of observation to confirm the scientific principle that everything that begins to exist has a cause.

And, of course, **we still have the prophecies given hundreds of years before Jesus**, and only one person who has fulfilled them, despite the infinitesimal likelihood of any individual ever fulfilling even a small number of those prophecies by chance.

Share Evidence

Some people will always be indifferent to the good news. Others will have emotional objections that evidence can’t overcome. And still others will choose to go their own way rather than submit to God no matter what. That’s their decision.

But why not present the evidence and let the truth be heard? If nothing else, people will walk away knowing that Christianity is a worldview to be taken seriously. And you will walk away prepared to challenge the doubts of even your most formidable critic.

Share more than just your personal testimony. Share truth that must be reckoned with.

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NOTE

A personal testimony is a useful supplement when sharing the truth of the Christian faith. In fact, it is a necessary supplement. But it’s not the main thing. The Christian faith would still be objectively true whether or not we had personally (or subjectively) experienced it.