

I don't think there's any doubt, that the most influential conversion in history, was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Most of us know him better by his Greek name – Paul.

- It was Paul who made real inroads in taking the gospel beyond the borders of Israel, and into the land of the Gentiles.
- It was Paul who wrote about half of the New Testament.
- In fact, **without** the writings of Paul, we would have very little understanding of “How, in Christ, we are saved.”
- And also, **many** of the questions that are answered in the New Testament, are only answered because of the depth of understanding, and Spiritual wisdom that Paul possessed. And a large part of that, was because of his background, and the intense training that he received **before** his conversion, at the feet of a highly respected teacher of the Jewish Law (Gamaliel)

But, as influential as his conversion was, and as amazing as his conversion was, I read it over and over again... and I just found myself wondering “Well, what is there left to say?” It's a testimony. And a testimony speaks for itself – I don't need to say anything else... (and at this stage, some of you will shout “Hallelujah”)

But Paul's testimony, got me thinking about testimonies:

- It got me thinking about “Who **has** a testimony”.
- It got me thinking about the **elements** of a testimony.
- It got me thinking about the **value** of a testimony.

Because as I said, “a testimony speaks for itself”. No one can argue with a testimony, because it's an **individual's** story about **their** encounter with God. And when it's **your** testimony, you won't forget it will you? And you won't get it

wrong. And so you don't have to learn a bunch of spiritual laws, or a bunch of Bible verses to try and quote, because you already have your story. You already **know** about your journey with Christ.

And I suspect that more people have come to faith in Jesus Christ, through the testimony of ordinary people like you and I, than who have **ever** come through high-powered preachers or famous evangelists. When someone hears the story of someone they know, and they hear how Jesus took them from where they were, and how they've been "born again" into Jesus, well that's powerful. And it's also powerful, when they see the change that Jesus has brought into someone's life...

A personal testimony is powerful; A personal testimony is challenging; A personal testimony is life-changing.

And a testimony is something that **all Christians have**.

*A friend of mine once started sharing his testimony with someone, and I overheard it: and he started off telling them how he used to be a bikie in The Hells Angels, and how his life was all tangled up in rape and murder and drugs....*

*And I was starting to go "What????", because I thought I knew this fella's story... And he said "No, just kidding. My dad was a minister", he said, "And I grew up in a Christian family", and then he gave his real testimony, about what it meant for him to be a disciple of Jesus....*

You know, we tend to think that for a testimony to be of any value, or any interest to anybody, we have to have some kind of horrendous story of what a terrible life we had, and how our

previous life was either addictive, criminal or deviate in some kind of way... – Not so...

You know, most people today feel that they're actually pretty good, and so they don't feel they **need** God... These people don't need to hear the story of someone who was an absolute rotter, because they'll surely agree, "Yes, they were an absolute rotter, and yes they surely did need a saviour. But not me."

What they need to hear, is the story of someone who might be just like you. They need to hear the story of someone who, at some point realised, that it's not what **I** do that gets me to heaven – it's what Christ has done. And it's my attitude **toward** Christ, and my relationship **with** Christ, that's important. They need to hear the story – not of a change of behaviour – but of a change of heart. They need to hear the story of someone who realised that "sin is not just doing naughty stuff". Sin is our attitude toward God. And if my heart is hard toward God, I'm filled with sin, just as much as the murderer, or the conman, or the adulterer.

That's what they need to hear – the story of real people – people who are just like them, only they've come to the realisation that they need a saviour.

We all have a testimony, and you might think that your testimony's not very exciting, but it's probably exactly the testimony that somebody else needs to hear:

- Maybe you believed there was a God, but for a lot of years, you hardened your heart toward Him... but then the Holy Spirit touched you in some way, and you shifted Him from the position of irrelevance, to being the most important Person in your life.

- Maybe you were a staunch atheist, but then in some way, God convinced you of His reality. And you received Jesus as your saviour
- Maybe you were broken, and through the love of other Christians, you experienced the love of God, and you turned to Him with your whole heart.
- Maybe your life was filled with secret sin, that you knew about, and God knew about, but to everybody else, you were the model citizen... But the Holy Spirit convicted you, and you found forgiveness and freedom in Jesus Christ.
- Maybe you were brought up in a Christian family, and you never knew what it was like to be **without** God. And other Christians seem to expect you to be able to put your finger on a date and an hour, when you first gave your life to Christ, and you can't, because you've always believed. You've always trusted. You've always known Jesus as your saviour and Lord... **Well there's your story...** Maybe you can tell about the times when your faith has been tested, but you've stood strong, because you believe it to be true, and you can share how you've experienced Christ to always be faithful.

Real stories (real testimonies), from real people. Never underestimate what God can do in people's lives when the disciples of Jesus bear witness to the mighty works of God.

So, what is a testimony – what are the elements of a testimony? Well, let's have look at the Paul's. Yours won't be the same, but you might have some similarities.

Firstly, there was a time before Jesus. And it talks about who Paul was: His heart; his attitudes towards God. And it also talks about his actions and behaviour.

Paul was very religious. He was **zealous** for God. He thought that he was doing God a favour by hunting down these rogue Christians... But he was actually working against God. His heart wasn't right for a start. His heart was filled with murder. **Breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.** And so he got permission from the high priest to go out after these Christians and arrest them and bind them, and extradite them back to Jerusalem for trial.

He was **zealous** for God, but he was zealously wrong. His heart was **far** from God. And his actions showed it. And so he heads off, heading for Damascus, preceded by his reputation – something that really made the Christians afraid....

So, before he knew Jesus, that was his heart. That was his actions. That was his attitudes and behaviours.

But then something happened, to turn him around. And every testimony has that – a point of rotation. A point of change. A point of repentance. A point where we **were** going the wrong way – we **were** living with wrong priorities – we **were** full of self and against God... But then something turned us around.

Paul had an encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. And there's no doubt about it – it was dramatic. A bright light from heaven, blinded him.

<sup>4</sup> And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?**" <sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.**" <sup>6</sup> **But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."**

Now, that was **Paul's** encounter with Jesus – **very** dramatic. **Your** encounter, may **not** be so dramatic. (Understatement?)

It may not be that dramatic, but the encounter that you **have** had with Jesus Christ, is just as important to you, and probably just as important for others to hear about, as what Paul's encounter was to him. Because all disciples of Jesus, must have had some kind of encounter with the Lord. Because, "How can I have God the Holy Spirit living inside of me, if I haven't encountered God?" ...

You cannot be a disciple, of somebody you don't know. You cannot have a living faith, in someone who's not there... And when we encounter God, we cannot stay the same.

Even after you become a Christian, you may have an encounter with God, where God convicts you of a certain sin that's been with you for years, and you fall on your knees in repentance, and discover anew, His mercy and forgiveness....

I'm talking about "repentance". The word "repentance" wasn't actually used in Paul's testimony, but **everything** that's described that happened to him, is a picture of repentance – he took on a totally different direction. He used

to persecute Christians – now he’s preaching in the synagogues.

### **Under new management.**

*Every now and then, you see a big sign hanging on a business (a shop, or a pub, or a coffee shop). Under new management.... What that sign’s saying to you, is “We’re not like we used to be”. We’ve changed for the better. Come and try us out. You might’ve been disappointed last time you came through the doors, but this time we’ll be different.*

*And sometimes, you go through the doors, and it’s a completely different experience – customer service is fantastic. The shop’s clean and tidy. The experience is just completely different, to what it was, under the old, tired, uncaring management... Under New Management.*

*But I’ve found, more often than not, the “Under New Management” sign might be true, but everything about the shop is exactly the same as it used to be... Something that’s supposed to be the promise of something much better, becomes a great disappointment for the would-be returning customers...*

Now, let me tell you, when God’s the new manager, you will not stay the same... Your heart will be changed. Your attitudes will be changed. And it’ll flow out in your behaviour – your actions will be different... In fact, when we encounter Christ, and believe in Him, the change is so dramatic, it’s like a new birth – And Jesus said, “**You must be born again**”..., and that’s what He’s talking about.

When we have an encounter with God, we cannot stay the same. We either reject Him, and we're that much more hardened against Him... or we crown Him as Lord.

And that's what Paul did. **"Who are you, Lord?"**  
And the Lordship of Christ, is an essential message, for all testimonies.

**"Who are you, Lord?"** And everything that Paul did, from that point on, was done **because** Jesus is Lord.

And so he believed. He repented. He was baptised.

So, what then? Well, the first thing he demonstrated, was a changed attitude towards Christians. He joined the church. He got together with other Christians. And in your testimony, that's one of the key things it's helpful to explain – how when you become a child of God, you naturally want to be together with God's other children. I gotta say, "If you don't love other Christians, then it's doubtful whether you love God".

What else?

Well, from the time that Paul was saved, he knew that he had a purpose. And guess what – "So do you". The Lord said: **he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of**

**Israel.** And do you know, the first thing he did – he started telling people that Jesus is the Son of God.

And we have a similar purpose. Our purpose – our calling, is to carry the name of Christ, wherever we go, always telling others about Jesus – always proclaiming that Jesus is the Son of God. And what could we possibly tell them? Well, we tell them our testimony, of course. This is what faith in Jesus means to me. This is how encounters with God have changed me. And He's the same God who desires to be known by you....

And so we all have a purpose, and you can share that in your testimony. "I'm telling you about Jesus now, because that's one of the reasons that I've been saved. Jesus rescued me, so that I can tell others about Jesus. He wants to save you too.....

But it's not all easy.

Paul's testimony, didn't gloss over the tough stuff. He knew from the outset that he was going to be persecuted, and he was. And yet his faith stood strong.

There's nothing easy about being a Christian. In 2 Corinthians, Paul tells us about some of his trials: <sup>11:23</sup>... far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger

from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup> And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.....

There's nothing easy about being a Christian. And yet the testimony of Christian suffering is powerful in itself. Why? Because it demonstrates a sureness of faith.

It's the difference between a preference and a conviction. Few people are willing to suffer for a preference. But many will die for a conviction.

And that's why the testimony of Christian suffering is powerful. It demonstrates a conviction – not a preference.

Hey, I'm not stupid (well, maybe I am), but not when it comes to Jesus Christ. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I believe that He died, and yet He lives. I believe that He is the saviour for all who believe in His name, and receive Him as Lord. For this I would die. This is a conviction – it is not a preference... And “conviction” makes a testimony powerful.

OK. So, you have a testimony. When's the last time you've shared it with someone?

The show's on today. Plenty of opportunity to meet with people and talk with them. How about you share your testimony wherever you can? Don't make it glossy. Keep it real.

Questions????