

STEP 2: RECORD IT

It's helpful to write your story down, even if it is only a rough draft. Don't worry if it doesn't sound perfect the first time. The process of writing forces you to think more clearly. The rough draft gives you the raw material to shape and refine. Think of a specific setting as you write. Imagine you are visiting with a friend, conversationally telling your story. What would you say?

If you are having a hard time, consider a theme to help you communicate your story. Some possible examples: performance addict, hunger for acceptance, broken relationships, alienation by others, betrayal, prodigal relationship with faith, major achievements without achieving meaning or sense of purpose in life, traumatic events, overcoming disability, diseases or beating the odds. Think about how the gospel message plays out through this theme.

STEP 3: REFINE IT

Now that you have a rough draft, you can begin editing it. Read back through your story and evaluate how clearly it communicates. Here are some pointers to keep in mind:

- **Remember: it is ultimately the story of your relationship with Jesus. It should point more to Him than to you.**

Does your story recognize the elements of the gospel message: an awareness of sin, a sense of relationship with God and that Jesus is the only provision for our sin?

- **How do you boil down days, weeks, even years of your life experience into a brief, yet engaging story?**

If you read Acts 21:37-22:21 and Acts 26:1-23, you should notice that Paul told his experience with Jesus in narrative form, not unlike the one you've created for yourself. Interestingly, it takes about 3 minutes to read these narratives aloud. You really can share significant amounts of your life story in a short period of time, but it takes some forethought, prayer, and practice. **Let the situational context determine how long and what you share.**

- **Translate Christian terminology into language familiar to your audience.**

Your experience only makes sense if communicated with words the other person understands. Most people lack the background to understand words like salvation, grace, gospel or phrases like "accepted Christ" or "received Christ." We easily underestimate the cultural divide between our Christian communities and those not familiar with the Christian narrative. Christian jargon may communicate effectively with those inside the community but speaks little to those on the outside. We need to practice translating significant biblical concepts into the language of those with whom we are communicating.

- **Be honest, but be careful not to speak judgmentally about specific groups or churches.**

It is normally best to avoid naming a particular person or group unless you are doing so positively.

- **If you received Jesus as a child, and were nurtured in the faith by a believing family and good church, be glad!**

You have a story that best reflects God's plan for his people. It's a favorite of his! But recognize that most with whom you communicate won't identify with your background. God's current activity in and through your life will be most relevant and attractive to them. You can flashback to how your journey began, but the story is more about what Jesus is doing in and through your life today.

- **Opening and close are important.**

Did you include an attention-getting opening sentence? Do you have a clear statement to close the testimony?

- **Be authentic when you communicate your story, especially about the difference Christ has made in your life.**

The power of a life story isn't ignited through painting an idealistic picture of a journey with Christ, but when an awe-inspiring God intersects the life of a very ordinary and often struggling individual, and stays with him or her even when life doesn't make sense.

- **Editing our personal story so that it is salty, relevant, and concise is a practiced art, perfected with experience.**

Ask for God's direction and He will give you the words he wants you to speak in each situation.

STEP 4: USE IT!

Remember, we are exhorted to "always be ready to give an account for the hope within us" (1 Peter 3:15).

Therefore, you should always be prepared to share your spiritual journey, whether a small slice or the whole story.

In this day and age, most people are best prepared for the one or two minute "feature" version. It is often best to share only enough to salt their thirst to know more. However, sometimes God will give us a platform where an extended version of our story is appropriate. In either case, Steps 1-3 above should prepare you to meet the opportunity well.

Think of your story as an accordion that can be expanded to share a fuller picture of the gospel and God's work in your life or something that can be contracted into smaller anecdotes for quick conversations. It is important to know and remember your whole story so you can adjust it depending on the circumstances. Practice breaking down parts of your story into downloadable vignettes like the woman in John 4.

READ John 4:28-30. The Samaritan woman shared her story in a sentence and a question. In similar manner, how would you share a piece of your story with a sentence and a question? Try to write it out:

EXAMPLE:

“When I was growing up, I was almost paralyzed by the thought of death. Then someone explained how Jesus overcame death. Has anyone ever told you how Jesus removes the fear of death from a person’s life?” or “When I encountered Jesus, I discovered that He satisfied my deepest longings. And the funny thing was, it happened in a bathtub. Can I tell you about it?”

STEP 5: COMMUNICATING IN FORMAL SITUATIONS

You may have an opportunity to give a formal presentation at the weekly meeting of an organization, church, banquet, half-time, team meetings or some other extended event. The following suggestions will help you be prepared:

- **Respect the time you are given to communicate.**
An hour? 10 min? 2 min?
- **Be sure to speak about what you have been asked to tell, and be careful not to manipulate the situation.**
Don’t disrespect the one asking you to speak by having your own agenda. You won’t be asked back and may do more damage than good to the cause of Christ.
- **Begin with an interesting attention-getting sentence or story to captivate the audience’s attention.**
- **Memorize your testimony to keep from rambling, especially the introduction and ending.**
Know how the plane will take off and also how it will land!
- **Rehearse your testimony until it becomes natural.**
Have someone listen and give constructive feedback.

- **Make it adaptable depending on your audience.**

One thing might connect better in Kenya versus America, with men versus women, with businessmen versus athletes, etc.

- **Speak clearly and recognize how fast you are talking.**

- **Remember previous pointers about authenticity, use of terminology, gospel components, etc.**

STEP 6: COMMUNICATING CONVERSATIONALLY

If God allows you to interact with people today, you have an opportunity to represent His work in your life in some small way. This could be a five minute process or a five year process depending on your audience and his or her own location on the spiritual map. Listening well always precedes speaking well, so we must improve how we converse with both God and others. Ask Him to give you wisdom on regarding those He brings across your path today.

Below are four steps that might help open conversations about God. Remember: nobody cares what you know until they know you care! Don't be afraid to ask permission to share more of the gospel message or your story once you are in the conversation.

1. Ask questions that probe significant areas of life. Utilize the following acrostic:

S ecular	Work? Watch the game last night? TV show? Current events? Local community, national and international news?
H ome life	Where are they from? Parents, siblings? Divorced or married? Close to family or distant relationally?
A ttitudes/views	What do they think or feel about some particular event? What was valued most growing up?
R eligion	Do they go to church? What was the spiritual climate like at home growing up? What do they think about matters of faith now?
E xperiences w/ God	Spiritual experiences, retreats, enlightenment?

EXAMPLE: Refer back to Crystal's story in Lesson 4.

If Crystal found herself sitting in the training room icing her knee, what type of questions could she ask to begin a conversation with someone?

- She could ask about his or her family (do you have siblings, where are you in the sibling line-up, who are you closest with relationally?)

2. Listen for common ground and for areas where your stories might be similar.

EXAMPLE: Crystal could ask about where the person's parents and siblings live, and what their occupations are.

- While we all see the world through different lenses, as humans we share common threads of life. We are all striving to move through a sinful and broken world, trying to make our way back to God. If you are genuinely curious about others lives, you will not have a difficult time finding places where your story overlaps with others. The key is asking good questions, listening well, and asking follow-up questions.

3. Offer a small slice of your story.

EXAMPLE: Crystal finds out that an immediate family member has died that was important to her. Crystal could ask: "How are you doing in the midst of the grief? "What is most difficult for you to accept?" As she listens and sees spiritual needs and connecting points she might offer a piece of her story ("I lost my dad my senior year of high school to a very sudden heart attack. It caused me to really question God and His goodness at the time.")

- Use a piece of your story that testifies to God's work in your life. Remember: You are not telling them what to do, you are simply sharing a piece of your story!

4. You may need to ask for permission to go on. Ask a follow up question about their spiritual story.

EXAMPLE: After offering her nugget Crystal could ask one of these follow up questions: how does/did it affect your view of God? Has God been a part of this process for you? This could lead to a deeper conversation about the gospel where Crystal may say, "Can I tell you more of how God has helped me realize He is actually my protector and provider?" If they are interested you can insert a portion of the gospel or a fuller gospel presentation, whichever is appropriate in the moment.

- We can engage in conversation with people every day—whether on the bus or in the training room icing your knee. Have spiritual eyes to discern needs and connecting points to see where God might want you to engage in conversation.

STEP 7: PRAY, PREPARE, PRACTICE

Reflecting on the life God has given you and considering how each slice might be helpful to someone else with similar experiences will give the Holy Spirit more to work with as you move through life communicating with others. God uniquely wired you and gave you a story—He wants to use you, and He will use you as you prepare and make yourself available to aid others on their spiritual journey.