



DEVOTIONAL

One time-honored and effective method of evangelism is the giving of your personal testimony. The skeptic may deny your doctrine or attack your church, but he or she cannot honestly ignore the fact that your life has been changed. The skeptic may stop his or her ears to the presentations of a preacher and the pleadings of an evangelist, but this person is somehow attracted to the human-interest story of how you found peace within.

Believe me; the steps that led to your conversion and the subsequent ramifications are far more appealing and appropriate to the non-Christian than a pulpit exposition of John 3 or Romans 5. If you have not discovered the value of telling others how God rearranged your life, you've missed a vital link in the chain of His blessing.

On six separate occasions between Paul's third missionary journey and his trip to Rome, he stood before different audiences and presented Christ to them (Acts 22–26). Six times he stood alone. Six times he addressed unbelievers, many of them hostile and rude. Do you know the method Paul used each time? His personal testimony.

Each time he spoke, he simply shared how his own life had been changed by the invasion of Christ and the indwelling of His power. Not once did he argue or debate with them. Not once did he preach a sermon. Why? Because one of the most convincing, unanswerable arguments on earth regarding Christianity is one's personal experience with the Lord Jesus Christ. No persuasive technique will ever take the place of your personal testimony. I challenge you to give serious consideration to thinking through and then presenting the way God saved you—along with the exciting results of His presence in your life.

Until then, you might want to think of three specific and important changes Christ has accomplished in your born-again life; these can become a part of your spoken testimony to unbelievers. And, if you know your testimony could use some written work and planning, schedule a time for it now—and write it on your calendar. We'll dive in more deeply tomorrow. This is exciting stuff!¹

Even the skeptic is attracted to the personal story of how you found peace within.

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OPEN IT

1. What is a favorite story that happened in your life that you love to tell others? What response do you get when retelling it?

READ IT

Acts 21:27-Acts 22:29

EXPLORE IT

2. Luke says that this episode comes at the end of seven days. What was happening prior to the opening of this text?
3. Who was angry with Paul and what caused this present uproar?
4. Who gets involved and seeks to bring order to the chaos? What is Paul's request as he is arrested?
5. What story does Paul share with the people?
6. What keeps the Romans from doing harm to Paul?

APPLY IT

THE ORIGINAL “FLASH MOB”

The background to our present text can be found in 21:26-36. Malevolent and slanderous charges were levelled against Paul that he had brought Trophimus, a Greek from Macedonia, into the temple precinct, which was reserved for Jews only. This was a capital offence, which even the Romans respected. It was a lie. The real motive was to end Paul's life and his ministry of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, with particular respect as he did so to the Gentiles.

Paul was therefore arrested under Roman guard. The mob was still trying to kill him but the Roman soldiers guarded his life. This is where we pick up the story. And it is also what gives rise to Paul telling his story. Let's learn some things that will help us to tell our story of God's grace to us. We can begin by acknowledging that sometimes we will face difficulties so that we will have opportunity to tell our story. But telling our story is actually a matter of telling God's story. We must be wise to use every opportunity to tell our story. And when we have opportunity, let us be sure that the focus of the story is not ourselves but rather the Lord Jesus Christ, the Hero of the story.²

7. **What reasons might unbelieving people have to get angry upon hearing a story of conversion? What kind of responses have you received when you told someone that Jesus changed your life?**

8. **A group of Jews from Asia had spread lies to create an uproar against Paul which in turn would create all kinds of trouble and even the possibility of death. What lessons can we learn about the lies we tell about others in this text?**

9. **We live in a world where the court of “social networking opinion” rules the day. How was this true in Paul's situation? What things can we learn about ourselves as we reflect on the mob's response and our great temptation towards gossip?**

Social media outrage has caused powerful executives to lose their jobs, brought down politicians, coerced prosecutions, shamed bad behavior, and provoked countless apologies. Perhaps our new information technology has

² Sermon by Doug Van Meter found @ <http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/telling-your-story/>

brought back what some thought had died out: communities exerting social pressure to enforce conformity to cultural norms. In the past, social disapproval was expressed through gossip, dirty looks, and other means of public shaming...

Today, social disapproval is expressed on Twitter and Facebook. But its effects are magnified, with the whole nation becoming like a gossipy small town... Social media lynch-mobs have been around since the dawn of the platform, but they have only grown in power and influence. . . .Objective procedures, legal processes, and the rule of law are necessary to counter the impulses of mob rule—to slow things down, protect individual rights, and implement justice.³

10. When has gossip or even unsubstantiated slander caused you to prejudge a person or situation? Why is such a response to juicy morsels of news unbecoming of a believer and what can we do so that we don't fall to such temptation?

11. What role do we see the governing authorities playing in this situation? How can the authorities be beneficial or harmful in situations like these? How does Paul's interaction with the governing authorities in verses 37-40 serve as a template for us when we are faced with dealing with the authorities today?

There was never a time when Paul was nearer death than this and it was the impartial justice of Rome which saved his life.⁴

DON'T I GET A PHONE CALL?

12. An amazing and somewhat surprising thing takes place in Acts 21:40; Paul stands before people and everyone falls silent. What possible reasons could there be for this violent crowd—which wants to cause bodily harm—to fall silent as he speaks?

³ Blog article by Gene Veith entitled Social Pressure or Mob Rule found @ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/2018/06/social-pressure-or-mob-rule/>

⁴ William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 11.

Peter urged Christians to be steadfast under trial: “always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil” (1 Peter 3: 15– 17). In Acts 22 we find the apostle Paul giving a masterly defense of the gospel— a gospel that had changed his life entirely.⁵

13. In what different ways can we defend the gospel? How can telling our own story of conversion be a proper defense before a group of skeptics?

14. Paul models how we can talk about our relationship with Christ. His three fold approach is clearly seen in our text. What type of heading would you put on each of these groupings of verses surrounding his story?

- **Verses 3-5**

- **Verses 6-11**

- **Verses 12-22**

How does your own conversion experience fit underneath each of the headings?

One of the essentials, if our story will be heard, is the ability to connect with those to whom we are speaking. And though this is not the only way, certainly the idea of identification is a powerful means to make such a connection. It would seem that this is precisely what Paul did here—in several ways.

First, note that he addressed them as “brethren and fathers.” Incidentally, this was also the way that Stephen, the first martyr in the Christian era (a martyr, not incidentally, at the hands of Paul!), began his speech (cf. 7:2). The results were not much different, but the approach was still correct.⁶

⁵ Thomas, Derek W. H.. Acts (Reformed Expository Commentaries) (p. 623). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Sermon by Doug Van Meter found @ <http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/telling-your-story/>

15. **The last thing that this crowd deserved was respect. They had lied about Paul and only saw him as guilty, deserving of death. How do we go about showing gentleness and respect to people who haven't earned it?**

If we want people to hear us—if we want our audience to hear our story—then let us learn to be sensitive, polite and respectful. The use of these terms was more than merely a case of Paul being polite. **By using them he was also identifying culturally with them.** These terms are very Hebraic, and Paul was trying to say to them that he still considered himself one of them. But the clincher here was when he began to speak in “Hebrew.” In actual fact, most believe that he was speaking in the Aramaic of the day, which was considered as being in the Hebrew linguistic family. Regardless, this clearly got their attention.⁷

16. **Paul sought to make a connection with the people he was speaking to. How can we do this type of bridge building today? How can we take this strategy too far?**

Paul’s story made it clear by implication that he could well relate to his Jewish audience and therefore to the struggles that they themselves faced when it came to following “the Way.” Paul’s words here were in fact a matter of public record. Paul was not embellishing his past, which is sometimes a temptation when sharing our story. Particularly in our day of technology, we had better be sure that our story is true!

Paul’s point was that he too was zealous for the law, and this was intended to strike a chord with his hearers. Further, his testimony concerning how he persecuted the followers of Christ was not for the purpose of making light of this or of bragging about his past but rather to highlight that he understood the angst of the Jews.⁸

17. **Why must we be careful to speak truthfully about our past? How can embellishing or sensationalizing our experience be a detriment to those who listen?**

⁷ ibid

⁸ ibid

If you were squeaky clean, then don't be ashamed of that! In fact, it clearly can be argued that Paul himself was. He lived a "lawful" life, but it was a self-righteous one. The gospel converting a drunk into a sober and upright citizen is no more glorious than the gospel converting a self-righteous Saul into a humble but righteous Paul.⁹

18. What word or two would you use to describe your salvation story? What elements of your story might be of great help to someone who needs the gospel?

Don't sugar-coat your testimony. Be willing to point out the difficulties associated with following Christ. The wonderful visions are often followed by periods of darkness and even of heavenly silence. After all, Jesus told His would be followers that they must take up their cross if He will be their Saviour and Lord. And since His cross is in many ways the template for ours; we should not be surprised if it includes episodes like Gethsemane. Be honest. God does not need us to sweeten the story to make it attractive to those whom He is drawing.¹⁰

19. What types of life change and practices were active and evident in Paul's life after he met Jesus? What happens if we simply talk about the benefits of being a Christian without sharing the struggles?

20. To whom is God calling you to share your story? What must you do so that you can be fully prepared when the opportunity arises? What is one way your group can pray for you as you step out in faith?

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

Note: This study was compiled, and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups