

Becoming A Contagious Christian

Session 2

Why should you tell your story?

Your story really does matter. Here are three reasons why:

1. Your friends will be interested.

A natural outflow of showing interest in them, listening to their concerns, and building authentic relationships is that they will reciprocate and want to find out more about you. Real friends want to understand each other's thoughts, values, and backgrounds.

2. They'll be able to relate to it.

We tend to get close to people with similar interests and backgrounds so it's likely that they'll relate to some of your spiritual experiences as well.

There's also an important lesson here: don't devalue your story just because it may not be sensational or dramatic. Even growing up as a 'good person' a lot of people can identify with you because they have similar backgrounds.

3. Your story is hard to argue with.

Chuck Swindoll in *Come Before Winter* said, "The skeptic may deny your doctrine or attack your church, but he cannot honestly ignore the fact that your life has been changed."

We live in an experimental culture where people want to know not just if Christianity is true, but whether it works. Your story powerfully illustrates that God is alive in your life and has affected how you think, what you value, and the way you live. Which is why it's so important that we live an authentic Christian life. It's our best argument for why others should follow Christ.

How to Organise your story.

Paul's Story: Three Handles.

So we're going to firstly take a quick look at how to organize your story and tell it. We'll start by looking at an example from the life of Paul for inspiration and for a model that we can follow.

In Acts 26 Paul tells his own story. Although he gives a lot of details, there's three main sections, or what we'll call today, three handles.

This approach organizes our experience in the order it happened and leaves us with a simple outline to follow rather than memorizing a whole presentation and then sounding like it's been memorized. It allows flexibility in how you might actually tell your story so you can tailor it to the person you're talking to and the situation.

First Handle: BC (Before Christ)

This represents Paul's life before Christ.

We see this first handle in Acts 26:4-11. Here Paul talks about his life growing up. He was a Pharisee who became convinced he should do everything he could to silence the teachings of Jesus, including putting Christians in prison and even condemning them to death. In verse 9 he says, "I did all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus."

Second Handle: † (Met Christ)

This part is represented by a cross. It's where Paul met Jesus.

We see this in verses 12-18 where Paul relates how he came to Christ. The Damascus Road experience. He saw a light and heard a voice. This is when Jesus appeared to him and appointed him to be his spokesperson.

Third Handle: AD (After Christ)

This is represented by the letters AD from the calendar makers which means 'in the year of our Lord.' This represents the time after Paul's incredible Damascus road encounter when he is now living After Christ. Or after his Christ experience.

We see this in verses 19-23 where we read about Paul's life since coming to Christ. He says he "was not disobedient to the vision from heaven... but preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."

Concluding Question

At the end of his story we see him encouraging his listeners to respond to what he just said by asking a concluding question. In verse 27 he asks: "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know I do."

This question moved Paul from merely sharing facts about himself to actually challenging the man to become a follower of Christ.

Unifying Theme

Finally as we read through Paul's story we find a unifying theme, which was his "intense passion for serving God," first without Christ and then as His follower.

During his BC life that passion expressed itself in destructive ways. But after he Met Christ, his AD zeal was positive and highly constructive.

So let's now look at our own stories. We'll develop them by asking ourselves 6 questions. If you want to write as we go along you can but just put the main idea down and you can refine it later if you wish.

First Handle: Before Christ.

So the first 2 questions relate to your story before you became a Christian.

1. What was your early spiritual background, and how did it affect you as you grew up – your feelings, attitudes, actions, and relationships?

Story Tip: Wisdom with DETAILS.

The first story tip is about having wisdom concerning which DETAILS of your past you should share: if your past involves a lot of graphic sins and mistakes, you may wish to tone it down a little. Be honest without unnecessary details. Otherwise some people might distance themselves from you.

2. What caused you to begin to consider following Christ?

In other words, what really got you started on your spiritual journey?

Middle Handle: Met Christ.

These next 2 questions are about how you actually met Jesus and received Him as your forgiver and leader.

3. What realization did you come to that finally motivated you to receive Christ?

Story Tip: Use of SCRIPTURE.

While everything we say needs to be consistent with what the Bible teaches, we don't have to consistently cite Scripture. In fact, if we quote too many verses it can inadvertently sidetrack or put off the person we are trying to reach. So consider if there's a key verse used in your life. If so then use that one, if not, then don't force it.

4. Specifically, how did you receive Christ?

Story Tip: Making it CLEAR.

Before you answer that question it's important that we make our message CLEAR. In other words, make sure you explain how you received Christ in a way the other person can imitate. For example if you became a Christian at an evangelistic event, then mention that. But focus on the specifics of the message you heard and what you prayed in response to it. Even if your friend doesn't accept Christ then and there, they'll at least have an example they could follow later.

Maybe you can't pinpoint the exact time and place you received Him, just that it was during a certain season in your life when you began a relationship with Him that has changed your life. That's cool too. Just make sure you're clear that during that time you genuinely received His forgiveness and leadership and can summarize what you understood and received during that broader time frame.

Third Handle: After Christ.

These last 2 question relate to the third handle of your story. Your life since meeting Christ. Now the focus turns to the difference Jesus has made in your life. This illustrates why your friend should also follow Christ.

Also, these two questions should somehow address the problem you mentioned in the first question.

5. How did your life begin to change after you trusted Christ?
6. What other benefits have you experienced since becoming a Christian?

Especially think of ones that would best relate to the person on your Impact List.

Concluding Question

Something that requires a RESPONSE from the other person.

Paul asked the king if he believed the prophets. This turned the story from a mere autobiography into effective evangelism. We need to do the same.

Unifying Theme

This is the central issue in our story that illustrates the difference it's made to know and follow Christ.

This starts with the problem or situation in the First Handle and at least is partially resolved in the Third Handle.

Story Tip: Use of LANGUAGE.

We need to convey biblical truths in ordinary language, avoiding religious clichés and church talk. It's easy to forget that much of what we say to each other has meaning only within our own circles but sounds like a foreign language to those outside our group.

By taking the time to rethink the words we use, we can remove unnecessary communication barriers for our friends.

Story Tip: Length and SEQUENCE

It's best to keep your story brief and to the point. Your friend can always ask for more details. Regarding sequence, we just learned a simple chronological order. Have some structure to the way you present your story. Sometimes you may start at handle three and work backwards. But don't jump all over the place.

Final Story Tip: Focus on your friend.

We need to ensure that as we're communicating, our friend is tracking along with us. Are they following along with us and understanding what we're saying? If not then it's important that

we stop and help them understand. Remember that ultimately, the point of your story is more about the other person than it is about us. Focus on aspects that will relate to their interests and concerns.

Play DVD: How Do you get to Heaven?

It's so important that we cut through the confusion and help people find how they can follow and know God.

Imagine this. You've got a friend you've been trying to reach out to for a long time. Suddenly one day she surprises you by saying:

Listen, I went to church when I was a kid. It just seemed like a bunch of rules and rituals. I walked away from all of that years ago and haven't thought about it much since. But maybe I missed something. Just in case, can you make it simple for me? What is Christianity really all about, and why should it matter to me now?

Do you know what you'd say? A lot is hanging on your answer. She doesn't want a long complicated answer and doesn't want to go on some long drawn-out spiritual search. But she is interested enough to ask. Can you communicate the central message of the Christian faith in a concise way?

A lot of us may feel uncomfortable to do so. So let's have a look at how we can.

God's Message.

When it comes to telling others about God, Christians are famous for making the message either too simple or too complicated. Sometimes we are tempted to just say God loves you, or All you have to do is believe in Jesus. These statements are true but they leave out essential information our friends need to hear.

Or sometimes we can give them the long drawn out theology, church history and biblical interpretation and how it has changed over the years. And don't forget throwing in the Hebrew and Greek definitions as well. These can all be useful in the right context, but a lot of the time can actually cloud the understanding of the people we're actually trying to reach.

Five Second Gospel.

To get us started, let's start with something called the five second gospel.

Here it is: "God LOVES us, we BLEW it, Christ PAID for it, we must RECEIVE Him."

Now do you guys remember the sermon last week? I hope so...

Four Key Characters:

Character 1: God. "God loves us."

1 John 4:16 says God is loving. The bible also tells us that He is Holy and Just and must judge sin according to His perfect standards.

Now if He were only Holy and Just we'd be in big trouble. Thankfully because He is love and we matter to Him, He graciously provided a way of escape from the judgement we deserve.

Character 2: Us. "We blew it."

We were created as morally good humans but, starting with Adam and Eve, all the way down to you and me, chose to go our own way and became sinful. As God is Holy and Just, He must punish our sins. Romans 6:23 tells us that "the wages of sin is death."

This death means separation from God for all of eternity.

We are spiritually helpless to help ourselves and we, and our friends are absolutely in need of God’s forgiveness and help.

Character 3: Christ. “Christ paid for it.”

The Gospel is Good News. Christ is God, who also became man, and came to earth to pay the spiritual death penalty that we owed by dying on the cross for us, and then He rose from the grave to give us new life.

Jesus is our Substitute. 1 Peter 3:18 says “Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”

By paying the penalty, He provided the way for us to receive His forgiveness and salvation. And now He offers His forgiveness to us – and to our friends – as a GIFT.

Character 4: You. “We must receive Him.”

It’s not enough to simply know about Jesus and His payment. We must respond by receiving His payment as a gift to us.

You can know everything, and live a religious life and even believe the right information about God, but never apply it to your own life and benefit from it.

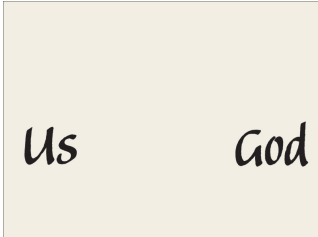

We must receive Christ by asking Him to be our forgiver and leader. The result of receiving Him is spiritual transformation by the Holy Spirit.

The Bridge Illustration.



Now we’re going to build on what we’ve reviewed so far by learning another illustration that has helped countless people understand the Gospel. It’s called the bridge and was originally developed by leaders in the Navigators ministry.

Draw it out as you see the pictures come up on the PP. A great way to learn it.

Key Characters	Narrative	Picture
GOD	<p><i>God loves us, and He wants to have a relationship with us.</i> (Write “God” on one side and “Us” on the other side.)</p>	
US	<p>However, <i>we blew it</i> by rebelling against Him, and this broke off that relationship. (Draw lines by both words to form walls on each side of a large chasm.)</p>	

Helping our Friend cross the Line of Faith.

So as we draw near the end of this series and before we look at the last segment of today's session, I want to highlight three kinds of invaluable tools that will help you greatly in your efforts to reach others.

Books and Recordings

First is seeker oriented books, music, and teaching CDs or DVD which can serve to further your personal efforts to encourage your friends in their spiritual journey.

Outreach Events

These include events hosted by our church or by other churches in the local area. Whether it's a Christian movie or concert, a seminar, or special holiday service, these can all be powerful supplements to our own individual efforts. So make some bold invitations.

Each Other

Utilise each others styles and strengths. Pray and partner up with each other to try to reach all our friends. You can become an intentional link in the chain and together form the chain of influences that lead others to Christ.

To finish off today I wanted to quickly look at how to Cross the Line of Faith.

Our aim is to be Contagious Christians who are active in leading others to Christ. Our aim is to not just to learn how to talk better or help people understand better – it's to help them reach a point where they too, trust Jesus as their forgiver and leader. That's what it means to Cross the Line of Faith.

We can't make that decision for them nor should we rush them to it. But we need to encourage them and help them make steps towards it. That's the most encouraging and exciting part!

Nothing compares to being there when they step over that line. So please don't leave that part for the pastors or some 'professional'. God wants to work through you.

So let's look at the 5 elements of this process.

1. Approaching the Line

Getting our friends to the point where they're ready to accept Jesus is a process that could take days, weeks or years. This means we must be patient and continue to pray for them, deepen our relationship, raise and discuss spiritual issues and communicate the gospel in natural ways.

Along the way let the Holy Spirit guide you in how bold and direct you need to be. Sometimes if the time is right you may be surprised as the Spirit urges you to be very strong with your friends. Perhaps they are more open to His leading at that time. Other times you might sense the Spirit urging you to ease up a bit.

As a general rule most of us need to lean more to the bold side – but always seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

2. Checking READINESS

There may be times where you sense your friend is getting clearer on what it means to become a follower of Jesus and might be ready for the decision. Make sure that you are always prayerfully watching for those points and to make the most of those opportunities when they appear.

There's some questions you can ask them to assess where they're at.

Have you come to the point of TRUSTING Christ, or are you still in the process of thinking it through?

Make sure you let your friend know it's ok if they're not there yet. If they respond saying yes, they're ready, follow up with this question.

That's great... where would you say you are in the process right now?

If you've used the Bridge illustration you can clarify this question by pointing to the person standing on the left side and asking if they're right on the edge of the chasm wanting to get across or further back away from the edge, still thinking it through.

If they say further back don't get discouraged. This is a great chance to ask them what's holding them back, and then spend time discussing any issues they're going through. Maybe they're unsure on some information you've shared. Try to bring more clarity to them.

If you don't know the answers to what they're asking write the questions down and promise them you'll go away and do some research. Don't make up an answer you're unsure about. Go and find a good book or someone else who might be able to help you with the answer.

Maybe you'll spend a bit of time sorting through some issues. Then ask them the question again. The barriers may not be removed that quickly, but they may. If they're ready to move on then ask them the third question.

Is there any reason you wouldn't want to ask Jesus for His forgiveness and leadership right now?

A lot of the time they'll respond saying that they guess there really isn't. So now you're ready to help them cross the line of faith.

Always remember here that there is a spiritual battle going on inside the person, especially at the time of the decision. If you sense this going on, then sometimes it's good to say, "Not yet, this isn't a good time for this. Why not wait until you've had a chance to think more about it?" Assure your friend that the resistance isn't a surprise and try to help them work out if it's because they need more clarity or more time. Encourage them to continue looking to God and to turn and follow Jesus.

3. Prompting in Prayer

If your friend is willing to pray with you to receive Christ, the first thing you need to do is relax. Prompt your friend to pray in their own words. It's not about saying the right thing but the attitude behind it.

Prompt them to pray about three areas.

Ask for the FORGIVENESS of Christ.

Encourage them to admit that they have disobeyed and sinned against God and that they want His forgiveness and salvation Jesus paid for on the cross – and now freely offers them.

As for the LEADERSHIP of Christ.

Remind them that they don't want to keep living the same old ways. So they need to ask God to come in and lead them as they live their life for Christ.

Give THANKS for God's forgiveness and leadership.

Tell them that if they meant what they just said then there's good news, God has already forgiven them and has begun to change them from the inside out. So prompt them to really praise God and thank Him for what He has already done, is doing, and will do. This is the natural thing to do.

Close the prayer yourself thanking God for working in your friends life and bringing them to this exciting point. Ask for the Spirit continual blessing and protection over them from this day forward.

4. Celebrate

Congratulate your friend for making the most important decision of their life. Don't change the subject or rush onto something else. Acknowledge what just happened and discuss how important it really was. Let them say how they feel. Celebrate with them.

Be aware that not everyone will react in the same way. Some will shed tears of joy, other will give you a big hug. Others will look at you and say calmly, "Thanks, I needed that, what's next?" Don't worry if they didn't feel anything. What matters is that they sincerely asked God for His forgiveness and leadership.

Maybe you'll want to share the awesome news in Luke 15:10.

There is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

5. Point toward the next steps.

One of the biggest mistakes we make is thinking that once our friend has received Jesus it's the end. But it's really the beginning. We need to encourage and coach them so they get off on the right foot in their walk with Jesus.

There are several areas to cover as part of encouraging them in their spiritual growth:

- The importance of PRAYING DAILY
- The need to regularly READ THE BIBLE
- The importance of RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS – with other Christians, with a solid Bible-teaching church, and with non-Christians they know and will want to try to reach for Christ.

We've covered a lot in these sessions and gained a fresh understanding of evangelism and what it can look like in our lives.

One last thing I want to say to you today is, You Can Do This! With God's help, every one of us can be used to usher other across the line of faith and into a saving relationship with Jesus.

Never forget the Gospel still works in the hearts and lives of people today!

So let me urge you, Go for Spiritual Broke. Give your all for Christ, and for reaching others with His love and truth. There is no greater adventure, and there will be no greater reward. And the people God uses you to reach will thank you for the rest of their lives – and into eternity.