

ON MISSION TO SHARE JESUS

SPECIAL SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SMALL GROUP STUDY

LESSON ONE

HOW CHRIST CHANGED YOU AND HOW TO TELL ABOUT IT PRESENTING YOUR PERSONAL STORY OF SALVATION

LESSON AIM

The purpose of these lessons is to equip believers to become effective witnesses for Christ by using their personal testimony and a simple witnessing card.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Teacher, please read through this section carefully as you prepare to teach this study.

The Holy Spirit may use you to be the catalyst that motivates fellow Christians to live the Great Commission—that's how important this material is.

This two-week study is designed to:

- Teach your students how to share their story of salvation simply, conversationally, and with appropriate theological supports.
- Teach your students how to use the *One-Day* witnessing card as a support to their testimony.

We hope you'll enthusiastically prepare to share these two lessons, and that you will lovingly, but directly, challenge your people to do the work of preparation to share the gospel.

Too often, we as spiritual leaders almost back into the Great Commission, virtually apologizing for it with a *you can do this* attitude. Instead, we must enthusiastically, but firmly, set a high standard. *Assume* that Christian people will do what Christ commands them to do—spread the gospel. Walk with the expectation that they will share if they have the equipping that enables them.

These two lessons could change the spiritual walk of many of your students and could eternally change the lives of countless people they encounter. Give it all you've got, as Jesus did for us!

MATERIALS NEEDED

As you get ready to teach these two sessions, you will need to provide your students with the following:

- A copy of the personal testimony worksheet for each person. This sheet is at the end of this teaching outline.
- A *One-Day* witnessing card for each participant. These can be ordered from North American Mission Board by calling 1 866 407-6262 or visit www.namb.net/catalog.

LESSON ONE TEACHING OUTLINE

Teacher, use the following outline and time suggestions to cover the material in this session. Feel free to change any of the time suggestions or lesson content to fit into your particular Sunday school or small group context.

Story-telling Time (10 minutes)

Ask your class this question: "What's the greatest story you've ever heard?"

- Maybe it's something you read in a book or magazine.
- Maybe it's a favorite childhood story.

Teacher, be prepared to share one of your favorite stories. Take no more than five minutes. Share your favorite story enthusiastically. When you have finished, share with the class that a person's story of coming to faith in Christ is one of the greatest stories that a person could ever tell and one of the most important.

Ask, "How would you tell your story about coming to know Jesus?"

Explain to the class that over the next two weeks they will learn a very simple and effective way to tell the greatest story ever told. It is a very personal way that communicates truth to a culture that values personal experience.

How to Begin a Witnessing Conversation (3 minutes)

Explain to your class members that starting a witnessing conversation is often the hardest part. Questions such as, "What do I say first?" or "How do I bridge the conversation to the gospel?" may be among the many questions that a believer who wants to share Christ may ask.

Ask your class: "Do any of you have any good examples of ways you entered into a conversation that led to you sharing the way of salvation?" Take time to briefly entertain answers.

Overcoming Fear (4 minutes)

Explain that fear is the number one excuse believer's give for not sharing their faith. Fear is a natural feeling when witnessing—natural to man. The supernatural lives in us, however, and it is on the basis of the power of the Holy Spirit working in us that we can fearlessly share our story and the truth about how to know Christ.

Fear is the opposite of faith. Share with the class these two powerful verses:

- "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7, NASB).
- "But He said to them, 'Why are you are so fearful? How is it that you have no faith'" (Mark 4:40, NKJV).

Tips to Starting a Witnessing Conversation (5 minutes)

In many ways, these tips are similar to how you start any conversation.

a. Be natural.

People recognize a phony quickly. Thus they also recognize a sales job. You're not trying to sell anything. You are not even trying to convince anybody of anything. Take the pressure off yourself and be natural by approaching the conversation as if there is no pressure on you—because there is not!

All you have to do—as you'll see as you learn this process—is share your story. The convicting and convincing is up to the Holy Spirit. No pressure—just relax and share what God has done in your life.

b. Begin by talking about normal stuff—job, background, hobbies, family, current issues.

These are all natural bridges to sharing the gospel, especially when you start sharing your interests, hobbies, etc.

In short, imagine or role play some ways you could transition into a spiritual conversation. How would you transition to a conversation about baseball? Your family? Politics? It's not so different—don't be intimidated, but be prepared.

Your Personal Testimony (8 minutes)

A personal story or testimony is divided into three areas:

1. Your life before you made a commitment to follow Jesus.

This section includes what your life was like before coming to Jesus. Loneliness, lack of purpose, hopelessness, and so on, may all be part of your story. It culminates in the discovery that each of us are in need of a change and a recognition that humankind's most basic problem is sin.

2. How you came to know Jesus personally.

How did this occur in your life? Was it in a worship service that you came to know Christ? How did you discover that God loves you and that Jesus died for your sins? When and where were you when you received Jesus as your Savior?

This part of your story communicates the circumstances and events surrounding your life-changing encounter with Christ.

3. How Jesus has changed your life since you came to know Him personally.

The last part of your story communicates briefly how your life is now different as a result of salvation. Indicate the impact He has had on your life.

An excellent model of a personal testimony and its use is found in Acts 22:3-16. Teacher, whether or not you review this should depend on how much time you have left. If you think you're running out of time, say, "In the next couple of days, have a quiet time centered on this passage. Mark it now, and read through it later, observing how Paul shared his story."

Acts 22:3-5—Describes Paul's life before Christ.

Acts 22:6-13—Describes how Paul came to know Christ.

Acts 22:14-16—Describes how Paul's life was changed.

Some Facts About Your Testimony (2 minutes)

We live in a post modern culture—a culture of relativism and tolerance. It is a culture that cannot accept the truth that there is only one way, truth, and life. In our witnessing efforts, we never apologize for the truth, but we can be smart enough to take advantage of the cultural conditions. The fact is that this post modern culture highly values personal experience. Therefore, your testimony—your personal experience—has validity.

Your personal experience is very important. It has authority. It communicates. It relates. It is powerful. It may be easy to argue facts—and by the way all the historical and scientific facts are on your side in sharing the story of the risen Savior—but it is not easy to argue with your personal experience.

Constructing Your Testimony (15 minutes)

Explain to your class that in just a few minutes you are going to give them time to write out their personal testimony on the worksheet you have given them. Explain that it is quite simple. First, a few tips.

Not everyone has the drug dealer-to-choirboy testimony, and that is all right! Every testimony is valuable and speaks of an eternal change!

What if you accepted Christ at a very young age?

In the section about your life before you committed to follow Christ:

- Focus on a defining moment in your life.
- Focus on how Christ has protected you.
- Focus on the direction your life could have gone.
- Focus on what Christ saved you from.

Example: Though I had a very happy childhood, I did not understand the truth about Jesus Christ and the importance of following Him until _____.

Maybe a defining moment helped you understand the importance of knowing Christ. A testimony might read something like, "When I was young, I was taught a lot of wonderful things about God. My parents took me to church and gave me a Bible when I was little. I read it often. As a young child, I entered a personal relationship with Him. When I turned 10-years-old, my grandmother passed away. My mother told me that one day I would see her again in heaven. I came to understand that had it not been for my relationship with God, I would never go to heaven. Even though I was young, I realized that I needed to be changed."

In the section about coming to know Jesus personally:

You must speak theological truth in practical language here. After you've set up the scene in which you come to know Christ, you want to be very clear about what happened next. For instance, "At that point, I realized that I was a sinner and would spend eternity separated from God in hell unless I asked God to forgive me and asked Jesus Christ to guide my life. That's what I did—I prayed and asked God to forgive me. I told Him I didn't want to sin any more, and I asked Him to come into my life and lead me." Use your own words, but be careful to communicate the point of change very clearly.

In the section about your life since Christ:

This may be in sharp contrast to your life before Christ—depending on your circumstances. If so, play off of the contrast. Christ is the difference-maker, so stress the difference. Talk about how you’ve seen God’s hand in your life since coming to know Christ. Talk about the peace and strength He gives you—any attributes of Christ that are strongly evident in your life are worthy of mention here. You should stress that you’re not perfect. You might include a line such as, “I still sin, but God has forgiven me. I still have struggles, but God sees me through and teaches me through them.”

Overall Tips for Sharing Your Story (4 minutes)

Avoid laborious details—it doesn’t matter that it was a windy day, and the preacher wore a pink suit, and the organist played “Just as I Am” on the morning you were saved.

Avoid the Christian lingo—the people you’re talking to won’t know it. Instead of the word *saved* use the phrase became a follower of Christ or other more elementary phrases. The description *filled with the Holy Spirit* might sound like a pew-jumping phenomenon to the person who has not been in church. Look back through your written testimony and replace any churchy Christianese words with simple statements of explanation.

Be yourself—show emotion where appropriate. We should be excited about the most exciting thing that ever happened to us.

IT’S TIME TO DO IT

Teacher, if you have followed the suggested timeframe, 45 minutes have elapsed. Depending on your Sunday school structure, you may have a few minutes left to let them begin building their testimony. However, you are likely to have to send them home with this part as homework. It would even be good if you could, through your care group networks or a special effort on your part, contact the class members during the week to remind them to have their written testimonies ready for the next week. A little accountability goes a long way.

Instruct the class to take the worksheet they have been given and to write out their testimony. Each part should be only 30 to 45 seconds in talking time. At a normal pace of talking, that’s 110 to 120 words per section, or 325 to 350 total.

Teacher, be especially sensitive to any student that may have difficulty in writing out his or her testimony. Some may not be able to do this simply because they have never trusted Christ as Savior. If a student is having difficulty, spend time away from class to discuss the person’s spiritual condition and share the gospel as needed.

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