

# Stretching Exercises

The Bible contains several personal stories that can serve as models as you think about sharing your testimony with other people. In Acts 22:1–16, Paul quiets an angry mob with his story of how he became a Christian. First he establishes common ground with the crowd ("I am a Jew ... brought up in this city ... trained in the law of our fathers"), then he admits to making many mistakes in his life, and finally he recalls the encounter with Jesus that led to his baptism.

Not everyone's story is as dramatic or as dangerous as Paul's. Still, all testimonies have similar characteristics. They are one-of-a-kind, eyewitness accounts of personal experiences that happen to people just like us. And because they continue to happen over and over again in our times and to our neighbors, they are constant reminders of Christ's relevance in this day and age. They stand as contemporary translations of what he can do in our lives right now.

Begin to organize your testimony by responding to these prompts:

√ Describe your life before you became a Christian.

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√ Recall the moment you realized that you wanted and needed Jesus Christ in your life.

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√ Tell how you asked for and received Jesus Christ.

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√ Explain how your life has changed since you became a Christian.

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Compare the different versions of Paul's testimony in Acts 9:1–19, Acts 22:1–16, and Galatians 1:11–17. Although the facts are the same, descriptions and details vary. Now, think about your own testimony.

√ *How might you tell your story differently if you were talking with a preteen? A small group of same-gender friends? A large mixed gathering of adults whom you had never met before? A skeptic who showed no interest in spiritual matters?*

√ *What aspects of your testimony might you choose to emphasize or omit depending on your audience? Why? How would you compact your story into two minutes if that was all the time you had to reach someone?*

Jesus has told us to make disciples of all nations, baptize new believers and teach them about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How can you follow this commission if you are tethered to a 9-to-5 job or are a stay-at-home mom responsible for young children?

Second Corinthians 3:2–3 says: "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (niv).

What does this passage mean to you? Try to paraphrase it.

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Which do you think comes first—words or deeds? Which is more important? Is there a way to balance the two?

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List four ways you can fulfill the Great Commission and "pass the faith along" without leaving your community.

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*Excerpts taken from "Stretching & Growing" by Charles H. Shumate*

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