

Telling People About Jesus: The Power of Our Personal Stories



SABBATH—JULY 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Mark 5:15–20; Mark 16:1–11; Acts 4:13; 1 John 1:1–3; Galatians 2:20.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘We cannot be quiet. We must tell people about what we have seen and heard’ ” (Acts 4:20, ERV).



Some people may experience a fast change the same as Paul on the Damascus road.

WHAT MAKES OUR PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT JESUS so powerful? First, Jesus warms our hearts with His love. Next, Jesus changes our lives. Then we have something important to say about Him. Sure, we can tell people stories about what Jesus did for someone else. But it is more powerful when we share our own stories about the things Jesus does for us.

It is hard to argue with someone's personal experience. People may argue with your beliefs. They may not agree with your explanation of Bible truth. People may laugh at religion or scold you for your faith in God. But who can argue with your experience? You can say, “I had no hope. But now I have hope. I was filled with guilt. But now I have peace. My life had no meaning. But now I have a reason to live!” Even people who doubt can be moved by the Good News when they see how Jesus changes your life.

Some people may experience a fast change in their spiritual lives the same as Paul on the Damascus road. But most people change little by little over time. They start to understand who Jesus is. Then they become grateful for Jesus' wonderful gift of mercy and His wish to save them from sin. Jesus changes our lives fully. He changes us in a way that other people can see. This change is exactly what the people on this earth want and need very much.

THE MAN THAT NO ONE EXPECTS TO BE A WITNESS (Mark 5:15–20)

Read Mark 5:15–20. Do you see how Jesus sends the man into Decapolis to witness? Why doesn't Jesus keep the man near Him to help his new faith grow stronger?

The word “Decapolis” comes from two Greek words: “**deca**,” (“ten”) and “**polis**” (“city”). Decapolis was an area made up of ten cities along the Sea of Galilee in the 1st century. The people there talked in the same language and shared the same way of life. Many people in that land knew about the man filled with thousands of demons. The demon-filled man did strange and awful things that scared the people. No one trusted this man. Jesus saw deep into the demon-filled man's heart. Jesus saw that the man wanted a better life. So, Jesus healed this man.

Then the townspeople heard what Jesus did. They learned that Jesus let the demons move into their pigs. The pigs jumped off a cliff into the sea and drowned. Mark tells us, “Then [the townspeople] came to Jesus. They saw the man who had been controlled by many demons. He was sitting there. He was now dressed and thinking clearly. All this made the people afraid” (Mark 5:15, NIV). The man was healthy again. Jesus changed the man's thoughts, feelings, and spirit. This is what the Good News does. It takes people who are broken by sin and makes them better people.

That is why this man is the best witness to the ten cities. The man's life is fully changed. Now he can share his experience about Jesus with everyone in Decapolis. Ellen G. White writes, “We are witnesses for Jesus. It is our job to tell people what we know about Him. We must share what we see, hear, and feel about Jesus. If we follow Jesus step by step, we will have something to share with people about the way that Jesus leads us. We can tell people how we trust in God's promise and know His promise is true. We can share what we know about God's mercy too. Jesus wants us to tell people about Him. People need to know about Him or they will be lost.”—*The Desire of Ages*, page 340, adapted. God often uses people that no one expects Him to use. These people change lives because Jesus first changed them.

What is your story? How did you learn about Jesus? What can you share about your experience to help someone who does not believe in Jesus?



Jesus changes the man's thoughts, feelings, and spirit. The Good News takes people who are broken in sin and changes them in every way.

OUR SAVIOR LIVES (Mark 16:1–11)

It is early Sunday morning. The two Marys hurry to Jesus' grave. They do not go there to ask Him for anything. What can a dead man possibly give them? The last time the two Marys saw Jesus, He was covered in blood and bruises. They never will forget what happened to Jesus on the cross. The women come to wash Jesus' body and get it ready for the grave. Their hearts are very sad. The future does not offer the women much hope.

The women arrive at Jesus' grave. They are surprised to see that it is empty. Matthew tells us what happens next: "The angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus Who was nailed to the cross. He is not here! He has risen from the dead as He said He would' " (Matthew 28:5, 6, NLV).

The women's hearts fill with joy. They no longer feel sad. Now they are glad. They stop crying. They sing songs of joy at the news that Jesus lives!



We, too, meet the same Jesus in life that Mary met. When we do, we must run to tell the story to other people.

Read about Mary in Mark 16:1–11. What does Mary do when she learns that Jesus wakes up from the dead?

Mary meets Jesus after He wakes up from the dead. Then she runs to tell the story to Jesus' followers. Mary cannot stay silent. The news is too wonderful to keep to herself. Jesus is alive! His grave is empty! People everywhere must be told about it. We, too, meet the same Jesus in life that Mary met. When we do, we must run to tell the story to other people. Good news must be shared! We must not keep the Good News about Jesus to ourselves.

It is interesting that Jesus' followers refuse to believe Mary's story. Remember, these are the same followers that Jesus Himself chose. Jesus also told them many times about His death and resurrection, or waking up from the dead. "But Mary told them that Jesus was alive. She said that she had seen him, but the followers did not believe her" (Mark 16:11, ICB). There is an important lesson for us here. Jesus' own followers do not believe the truth right away. So, we also should not be surprised if people do not accept our words about Jesus right away.

When was the last time someone turned away from you when you tried to tell him or her about Jesus? What did you learn from that experience?

THE POWER OF A CHANGED LIFE (Acts 4:13)

“The Jewish leaders saw that Peter and John were not afraid to speak. They understood that these men had no special training or education. So they were amazed [surprised]. Then they realized [understood] that Peter and John had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, ICB).

The New Testament church grows big very fast. 3,000 people are baptized on one day (Acts 2:41)! Thousands of people are added to the church a few weeks later (Acts 4:4). Soon the leaders of the Jewish church start to understand why the church grows so fast. It is because the New Testament believers have been with Jesus. Jesus’ grace changes the lives of His followers. Grace, as we saw, is God’s gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin. These changed men and women cannot stay silent. They must tell everyone the wonderful news about Jesus.

Read Acts 4:1–20. What happens when the Jewish leaders try to stop Peter and John from telling people about Jesus? What is Peter and John’s answer?

At one time, Peter was a loud fisherman. God’s grace changed Peter. In the past, John and his brother James had a hard time controlling their tempers. So, Jesus named them the sons of thunder. Then Jesus’ grace changed them too. Thomas was filled with doubt. Jesus’ grace changed Thomas. Each of Jesus’ followers and New Testament church members have their own stories about Jesus. So, they cannot stay silent. Ellen G. White explains why this happens. “As soon as someone comes to Jesus, he wishes to tell other people about Him. Jesus is his precious Friend. Jesus saved him and changed his life. The Christian cannot shut away this truth in his heart.”—*Steps to Christ*, page 78, adapted.

Do you see what the Jewish religious leaders say in Acts 4:16? The healed man stands in front of them. So, the leaders must accept that a miracle happened. But they refuse to change their hearts. Does that stop Peter and John from talking about Jesus? Not at all!

What connection is there between knowing Jesus and sharing Jesus? Why must we know who Jesus is before we tell other people about Him?



The healed man stands in front of the leaders. But the leaders refuse to change their hearts.

SHARING OUR EXPERIENCE (1 John 1:1–3)

In Acts 26, we see that Paul stands in chains in front of King Agrippa. Paul tells the king his life story. Paul talks about the time when he attacked Jesus' followers. Then Paul tells the king how Jesus changed his life. Paul also talks about Jesus' promise to wake up the dead and bring them back to life (Acts 26:8).

Paul is changed on the Damascus road. There, the Lord says to Paul, "Stand up! I have chosen you to be my servant. You will tell people about me—what you have seen today and what I will show you. This is why I have come to you" (Acts 26:16, ERV). When we share our faith with people, it is always a powerful experience. What does it mean to share our faith? We tell people the story of everything that Jesus did for us in the past. We share everything that Jesus does in our lives today. We talk about what Jesus will do for us in the future.

Our sharing Jesus is never about us. Our sharing is always about Jesus. Jesus forgives our sins. He heals our sicknesses. He fills us with His love. He gives us good things (Psalm 103:3–5). So, witnessing is our sharing the story of Jesus' wonderful grace. As we know, grace is God's gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin. Witnessing is our personal story about meeting the God of grace.



Witnessing is our sharing the story about Jesus' wonderful grace.

Read 1 John 1:1–3. Then compare these verses with Galatians 2:20. What is the same in both sets of verses? How is John's experience the same as Paul's?

True, John and Paul have different life experiences. But they both have a personal experience with Jesus. Their experiences are not something that happens only one time and then never again. No, their experience happens daily. Every day they feel joy in Jesus' love. Every day, they follow His truth. His truth is the same as a bright light.

Is a changed life something that happens only one time? Ellen G. White talks about people who have an experience with Jesus only in the past. "They think their past experience is enough. So, they do not think they need to be changed daily. But we all must be changed by Jesus every day."—*Manuscript Releases*, volume 4, page 46, adapted.

Why must we know Jesus and His love day by day?

THE POWER OF OUR PERSONAL STORIES (Acts 26:1–32)

Let us look again at Paul's meeting with King Agrippa. Agrippa is the last of the Jewish kings known as the Macabees. Yes, Agrippa says that he is a Jew. But in his heart he is a Roman. (Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 6, page 436.) Paul fought his whole life in the war against evil. Now he is old and worn out. He is tired from his many trips to share the Good News about Jesus. Even so, Paul stands there bravely in front of the mighty king. Paul's heart is filled with God's love and his face shining with God's peace. Yes, many bad things happened to Paul in life. But he can say that God is good!

King Agrippa's heart is filled with doubt. His heart is hard too. He does not care about right or wrong. Paul is so different! Paul is filled with faith. He cares about the truth. He is loyal to God. He defends the truth with his whole heart. During his time in court, Paul asks Agrippa for permission to talk. Agrippa gives Paul permission.

Read Acts 26:1–32. As these verses show, how does Paul talk to Agrippa? What can we learn from Paul's words?

When we are kind to people, they open their hearts to us. When we are mean and nasty, people close their hearts to us. Do you see in these verses how much respect Paul shows to Agrippa? Paul says, "I am very happy to talk to you, because you know so much about all the Jewish customs [ways of life] and the things the Jews argue about. Please listen to me patiently [be patient]" (Acts 26:3, ERV). Then Paul tells the king about how Jesus changed his life.

Read Paul's story in Acts 26:12–18. Then look carefully at how Paul's story causes Agrippa to feel in Acts 26:26–28. How does Paul's story cause the king to feel? Why do you think Agrippa answers the way he does? What does Paul say that touches Agrippa's heart?

Paul's personal story about Jesus touches the king's heart deeply. Why? Because the most powerful proof about Jesus we can show other people is a changed life. Even kings who do not believe in God are moved when they see lives that are changed by God's mercy. Maybe our stories are not as powerful as Paul's. But we all can tell people about what it means to know Jesus and be saved by His blood.



Paul's personal story touches the king's heart deeply. Why? Because the most powerful witness we can show other people is a changed life.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “‘Almost Thou Persuadest Me,’” pages 433–438, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

What is the most important part of the Christian life? It is having Jesus in our hearts. When our experience with Jesus is rich and full, we will share it with other people. Yes, correct teachings are important. But teachings are no substitute for a changed life. Ellen G. White makes this truth plain and clear. “The Savior knows that arguing about the truth will never touch hard hearts. Our words are not enough to cause someone to stop being selfish. Reason and truth alone will not make people turn away from loving the things on this earth. Jesus knows that His followers must accept Heaven’s gift. Heaven’s gift is the Good News. The Good News must be shared by people whose hearts are first made warm from knowing Jesus. Then the Good News will have power. That is because a living knowledge of Jesus will give our words power. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, page 31, adapted.

In *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen G. White adds this powerful thought: “Yes, we must tell people about Bible truth. But the love of Jesus has the power to do what Bible truth alone cannot do. Jesus’ wonderful love will melt and win hearts.”—Page 826, adapted.

Some Christians have the wrong idea about what a personal testimony, or story, is. They think it means trying to make people believe Bible truth. Yes, it is important at the right time to share Bible truth. But our personal story about Jesus is about more than changing people’s minds. It is about changing hearts. Jesus frees us from guilt. He gives us peace, mercy, and forgiveness. He makes us strong. He fills us with hope and joy. He freely offers us His gift of everlasting life. This is what our personal testimony is all about.



“Our words are not enough to cause someone to stop being selfish.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Why do you think our personal testimonies, or stories, are so powerful? How have people’s testimonies changed you?
- ② Why is a daily experience with Jesus important to our faith?
- ③ Why is it important for us to live a holy life? How does that make our story about Jesus more powerful?
- ④ Share your personal story about Jesus with the class. Remember to share what Jesus did for you in the past and what He does for you today. How has Jesus changed your life?

AN OHIO CHURCH GETS NEW LIFE

Vince Waln, age 65, works as a money manager. He helps people save money and plan for their future. Vince also is a member of Hamilton Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is a small church in the U.S. state of Ohio. The church had only 15 members. But after three years, the church grew to about 85 people. What gave new life to this dying church? Vince says the Holy Spirit and a pipe organ!

The miracles started when Vince started preaching at the Hamilton church. Vince worshiped there when he was a child. "Not a lot of people went there anymore," Vince says. "There was no one to play the piano for my wife, Darla, when she sang special music. She had to sing with a CD."

One evening, Darla came home from a party for a bride at the Hamilton church. Darla told her husband that the church's pastor was leaving his job.

"You can be their new pastor," she told her husband.

For the next two weeks, Vince did not stop thinking about the church. He woke up at night thinking about his wife's words: "You can be their new pastor."

Soon after that, Vince volunteered to help the church for six months. Then the church leaders told Vince that for two weeks they prayed for him to be their pastor. That was during the same time that Vince woke up in the middle of the night. "It was the Holy Spirit working, for sure," Vince said.

As pastor, Vince invited Jerry Taylor to be the new music manager for the church. Jerry was retired. He also was a professional organ player. Shortly after, Jerry told Vince that a retirement community was selling a pipe organ for \$75,000.

"We can't afford that!" Vince said. "We can't even afford \$5,000. It's too much money!"

"Let's go look at it anyway," Jerry said.

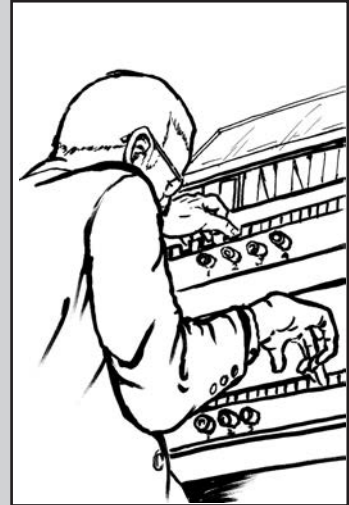
The pastor for the retirement community was excited to learn about the Hamilton church. He stepped out of the room and came back a little while later. He said, "I spoke with the manager for our community just now. We have looked for a church to give this pipe organ to."

So, the Hamilton church got the organ for free.

But the miracles didn't stop there. Workers made changes to fit the organ into the church. Christians from other churches joined the church's new choir.

Then two women walked into the church one Sabbath morning. They wanted to keep the seventh-day Sabbath after studying the Bible on their own. Later, one of the women and her husband were baptized.

God used the pipe organ to attract people. "People keep coming to our church," Vince said.



The Holy Spirit and a pipe organ gave new life to a dying church.

