



Sharing Your Story in a Broken World

Your story is one of the most important things about you. Your life experiences are what have shaped who you are, how you perceive life, God and others around you. God has both caused and allowed your experiences to be integrated into your very core. He has shaped you uniquely to have an impact in this world for His glory through the good things that have been a part of your life and also the hard things, the small and big 'death' experiences or 'arrows' that have wounded you in life.

The non-Christian world is tired of hearing about Christ, but not seeing any real life change. They are tired of hypocrisy and bumping into Christians with whom they cannot relate to, people who pretend to have it all together but are obviously in denial or out touch with the realities of real life. We have been afraid to be honest with others as we communicate what Christ has, or hasn't done in our lives....perhaps we are actually afraid to be honest with ourselves.

I have intentionally NOT called this exercise 'Sharing your Testimony'. Testimony conjures up mental images of someone standing in front of others starting with a story that begins at age 5 when they invited Jesus into their hearts and how life has been so much different and satisfying ever since.....that is not real life and probably not even Biblical! What I would like to steer you towards is first examining your own life, examining your own brokenness before you approach other broken people who do not know Christ. What are your longings deep down, where have you tried to meet them, what are the significant hurts and pains in life that have shaped you, what are your hopes, dreams, unmet expectations? Non-Believers have the same stories as you, the same pains, the same hopes. Yours have been shaped by Christ and your life is being transformed. But you are not yet complete, there are still 'death' experiences, perhaps daily. You are still not what you want to be or what you will be some day. You can admit that! You can be in touch with your 'already, but not yetness'....the fact that you are 'sanctified', set apart by God, but you are still being 'sanctified' day by day and true completeness will not come till you get a new body on a new earth.

But let's get practical. What does this all mean as you have opportunities to actually communicate with friends that are a part of this broken world? Below are some questions to begin with. They attempt to help you explore your own background. They are questions directed at helping you dig up emotions that are a part of who you are. Perhaps you already know them, or perhaps they have yet to surface still in your life and walk with God. Then, I will move you on to centering in on a broken area of your life in which God has indeed moved in to begin to heal. But, I want you to focus on an area in which the healing is not yet complete. An area in which you have seen changes that are beyond just trying harder and stuffing your emotions, but where true heart change has taken place as you have realized who you are in front of a holy God, but that he still loves you and gives you meaning, indeed gives you the status of God's child. Then you will form a brief explanation of your life in relationship with God, how this area has highlighted your need for God and how he has begun the process of changing you more and more and how your outlook on life has changed.

In communicating to a broken world, I think it still very appropriate to communicate how you began a personal relationship with Jesus, the steps of actually trusting Christ. But this may not be the focal point of your story...It does not need to start there. That is the struggle most people have. Most don't have a radical 'conversion' story and so your faith story doesn't seem to be very engaging. But your life is engaging! How God has moved is incredible and I want you to focus on that transformation rather than a moment or event in which you finally connected the dots and crossed over the line to

heaven. Don't get me wrong, Yes, receiving Christ is the greatest day of life on this earth for a Christian, but that is not necessarily the point non-believers are waiting to hear....that is until they understand that you understand real life....then they may want 'real' life as well.

Life History Questions:

1. What was the first death experience in your life that you can remember? The first time that life was not all that it was cracked up to be? The first time you got in a fight? The first time your dad hurt your feelings....or the back of your head!?

2. What were/are the specific emotions connected to those death experiences?
(ex. for me, not meeting my dad's expectations consistently built in me a longing for more security. It made me feel inadequate and caused a longing for approval from someone, anyone.)

What are consistent emotions that you have felt in life related to hurts or unmet expectations that have shaped you and your understanding for your need for God?

(Be careful to not just focus on the experiences themselves, but the emotions behind them. I may have a terrible hurt in my life from a break-up, others may not have the same hurt though. Where are we to connect then? I believe it is the emotions of life that will build bridges. We may not have the same experiences, but we all experience the pain of rejection, of loneliness, of hopelessness, of despair. What are the consistent emotions that have crept up in your darker moments, in times when life is not as life should be? This will be harder for some of you like me, and easier for others of course.)

Shaping the communication of your story:

Is there a story of significance that communicates a situation or circumstance that reveals an emotional state in which you saw your need for Christ and from which He has begun to work his life deeper into yours? Is there one situation or period that captures a bit of a theme in your life where it is easy to see your need for Christ? Try and be specific. One particular day and moment in high school where you broke down. A certain thing someone said that made you feel and believe your need for God. A constant idol that you seem to return to. *(ex. for me, it was a story of a break-up my Freshman year in college. That story captures a lot of what was going on in my life, heart and my emotions at the time but even on a wider scale shows some recurring issues in my life. It is also a story that connects easily with a lot of people who have experienced a similar break-up. But it can also connect with most everyone as I explain the emotions of loneliness, despair and insecurity that I experienced.)*

Brainstorm:**Outline:**

-Begin with the story or situation above capturing attention and letting people into your heart and emotions. Again, focus not just on the events, but what you were feeling at the time as I have said over and over. Try and let others in. Force yourself to be vulnerable in what you share.

Ex. "You may not know it, but I am terribly insecure.....here is why...". "I have always thought of myself as a strong person, until my parents split up...let me tell you about it". (for another engaging way to start with that divorce situation)- "I can't remember a day when my parents didn't fight. I can remember growing up confused of what true love really was. When I was 12 I came home and my dad's car was gone.....". (You grabbed my attention! I want to hear about what has shaped your life and changed you!)

-Then describe when you received Christ (probably going back in time for a lot of you) and what led to that moment, what you understood and what you did. (The process of trusting Christ and becoming a Christian)

-Now return to the emotions that have continued to be a part of your life, even after you trusted Christ. But now explain how God has slowly changed your heart and responses to similar situations. *(ex. For me, two years after the break-up, I was cut from my college soccer team. Again, this was devastating to my security. But I had a new outlook since God had drawn me nearer to Him and I was beginning to understand his love, care for me and his unconditional hand on my life.)*

-Close by returning to the initial story and explain a different response to that event now in light of processing it with Christ as Lord of your life. Ex. Though the divorce is still hard, the anger and confusion about love has been replaced with the model of perfect love.....

-Again, what I want you to focus on, are the longings of your hearts and the emotional attachments to them. As you explain those longings, talk about how Christ has come in to begin to heal them and redeem your life...though not yet complete and remember you don't need to communicate completeness because it is not yet there!

First pass Outline: