**Answers to Tough Questions**

**Week 4: *What Proof Does My Testimony Offer?***

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**Hook**



**Main Point: It’s hard to ignore a changed life.**

Celebrity endorsements are nothing new. As far back as the 1760s, Josiah Wedgwood used British royalty in advertisements to sell pottery.1 Mark Twain loaned his name and image to endorse fountain pens, clothes, and shaving products.2 Of course, celebrity endorsements have become a common practice today.

What real connection is there between the star athlete and the quality of the shirt he is selling? Do we really think an actor knows a thing or two about the life insurance he is paid to promote? On the other hand, what really gets our attention is when a friend tells us about a product he personally uses.

In a similar way, we can invite skeptics to read books defending the faith, but what can best catch their attention is seeing how Christ has transformed our lives. My grandfather spent eighteen of his retirement years making weekly visits to the county jail. Armed with nothing but a Bible and his testimony, he led more than 2,200 men to faith in Christ. His story was no celebrity endorsement; he was a man truly changed by the gospel. Our own testimony of Christ can make a difference too, and Acts 26 shows us how to do just that.

**Q: When have you been influenced by a celebrity endorsement?**

**Video Summary:** Many skeptics view a person’s experience with God as merely subjective thinking – something the person wants to believe. Can that really be said of a person whose experience is based in the historical fact that Jesus Christ was resurrected and is alive? Though people might argue with your explanation, it is hard to discount such personal transformation in Christ. It really doesn’t matter how much we know about our faith if we’re not willing to speak up. We all have a story to tell and need to be ready and willing to share it.

**OPTIONAL: WATCH THE TEN-MINUTE VIDEO SEGMENT FOR SESSION 4. THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.**

**Q: Jeremiah talks about the proof our testimony can offer to others. Brainstorm as a group other benefits of being willing to share your personal transformation.**

**Teacher, invite a couple of volunteers to share a short version of his or her personal testimony to emphasize the uniqueness of Christianity.**

**Q: When have you personally benefited from the power of someone’s story?**

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**Book**

**Main Point: It’s hard to ignore a changed life.**

## **Section 1: Acts 26:2-5 [Read]**

My wife and I once led an early morning Bible study group. I challenged everyone in the group to write down their personal testimonies of coming to faith in Jesus Christ. I discovered few had ever done this before. One man, a CEO, later told me it was one of the greatest responsibilities he had ever undertaken, but it was also the most rewarding. The apostle Paul’s defense in Acts 26 gives us a great example to follow.

Paul opened by announcing his defense. Defense renders the Greek word *apologia*, from which we get the word *apologetics*. A form of this word appears three times in this chapter (vv. 1,2,24). Paul’s story of transformation would inspire early Christians to persevere in sharing their faith, no matter the circumstances. Paul even declared, “I consider myself fortunate,” because he recognized this as a God-ordained circumstance to share his personal testimony.

In Acts 26:4-5, Paul told about his life before coming to Jesus Christ. We, too, should always begin our testimonies by sharing what our lives were like before Christ and what led to our need for Christ. Details of our lives before Christ are only important insofar as they set up our need for Christ and our transformation in Him. The point of sharing our story is not to offer endless details about our sins and, in effect, glorify them. We should share just enough to show the emptiness of the old life. Paul’s testimony in Acts 26 comprises twenty-six verses, and only five of those detail Paul’s life before Christ. In other words, less than 20 percent of his testimony was the “before” picture. That’s a good model for us to follow.

**Q: What are some words that describe your life before you encountered Jesus?**

**Q: What did you understand about Jesus before you became a believer?**

**Section 2: Acts 26:12-18 [Read]**

When we share our personal testimony, it is important to adapt our narrative to fit the audience. That’s what Paul did. This was the third account of Paul’s conversion story in the Book of Acts (Acts 9:1-9; 22:2-21), and while the structure was similar in each one, different details emerged.

For example, Paul emphasized one element before King Agrippa that was not brought out in the other two accounts. When Jesus asked Paul, then named Saul, why he was persecuting Him, Jesus said, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” (A goad was a sharpened branch, spear-like, used to move animals in a desired direction.) This referred to a Greek proverb that would have been familiar to the highly educated Paul as well as the prominent people he was now addressing.

Paul’s conversation centered on the appearance of Christ in a bright light. “I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun.” Even today, the church has embraced that phrase as a shortened way of expressing conversion: I saw the light. But for Paul, it was no mere metaphor; he really saw a light. He had witnesses who could back this up because Christ’s bright light was “shining around me and those traveling with me.”

Paul’s testimony from this moment forward focused on the work of Christ and the change He brought to Paul’s life. Everyone’s testimony should do the same: emphasize Christ. After all, our goal is not to get people to follow us; our desire is for them to embrace and follow Christ.

Paul’s testimony did not center on a one-time event; he shared how it had changed the whole course of his life. In Christ, we are daily being transformed more and more into His likeness—and that’s powerful.

**Q: How has your life changed since you started following Christ?**

**Q: How have the changes Jesus has made in your life led to changes in others?**

## **Section 3: Acts 26:24-26 [Read]**

It takes profound courage to share our faith. That certainly must have been the case for Paul as he stood before King Agrippa. This family had a history of opposing Christ and His followers.

**Q: What are some of the personal challenges we face in sharing our testimony with others?**

**Q: What aspects of your testimony might seem like foolishness to others?**

No one could argue with the profound change seen after Paul’s conversion to Christianity. Some who were present may have wanted to stop the influence of Paul’s conversion, but not one could argue against the fact that his life had changed. Word had spread quickly that the man who once persecuted Christians had himself become a Christian! Paul’s transformation could only be attributed to his encounter with the resurrected Christ.

Every sermon Paul preached ultimately centered on the resurrection of Jesus. He labeled the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as “most important” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Now as he stood before King Agrippa, Paul again highlighted the resurrection in his testimony. He introduced it early on and returned to it at the end.

Festus had brought Paul before the king to make his case, but now the thought of a resurrection was too much for his cynicism. Now the governor “exclaimed in a loud voice, ‘You’re out of your mind, Paul!’” Of course, Paul was not out of his mind. He had seen the resurrected Christ. All the apostles saw Jesus.

As ludicrous as the resurrection may sound to people like Festus and King Agrippa, all the evidence points to the reality and validity of the resurrection of Christ. Add to that the evidence of a changed life. People may question the resurrection, but they can’t dismiss the change they see in us!

**Q: What are some practical ways we can share our stories with others?**

**Teacher, provide participants with a sheet of paper and pen. Create a timeline that includes important moments when God worked to draw you closer to Him, and especially when you were saved. Then answer the following question.**

**Q: How have you been able to take some of those key moments in your journey and share them in ways that impacted others spiritually?**

**Reflect back on the Main Point for this session: “It’s hard to ignore a changed life.” In what ways does this statement now empower you to share your story with others who need to hear it? Be specific.**

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**Took**

**Main Point: It’s hard to ignore a changed life.**

Encourage group members to consider the following applications to tell others about their changed life in Christ:

**Write.** Write out your story of faith in Christ. Note what your life was like before Christ, how you came to faith in Him, and what your life is like now.

**Pray.** Ask God to lead you to those with whom you could share your testimony. Pray for an open door into a conversation about the difference Christ has made in your life.

**Share.** Share the testimony of your walk with Christ Since coming to know Him. Let it be a natural part of a conversation.

As powerful as celebrity endorsements can be for selling a product, they pale in comparison to the power of a testimony of a changed life through Christ. We have a story to tell that can lead to a new perspective here and now – and a new destination in eternity! Spend some extra time every morning this week asking the Lord to make you constantly aware of opportunities He is placing before you to share your story with those who need to hear it.

1. “Celebrity Endorsement—Through the Ages,” <http://ibscdc.org/Free%20Cases/Celebrity%20Endorsement%20>Through%20the%20Ages%20p1.htm.

2 “The History of Celebrity Endorsements and Product Placements,” *Celebrity Cred*, https://celebritycred.com/history- of-endorsements/