

“Sharing God’s Story in You”

Acts 26

Sharing our faith in Jesus Christ should be the most joyful and natural thing we want to do. But we do find it hard because we assume people don’t want to hear it. If we find it a little fearful sharing it a co-worker, neighbour, teammate or family member (people we know) imagine being called to the Ontario Legislature and stand before the Premier and all members of provincial parliament. That’s a modern day scenario of what Paul faced in Acts 26. Appealing to Caesar in a lower trial (Acts 25) Festus is more than happy to send Paul to Rome but he really has no serious accusation with which to level at Paul. Other than that the Jewish leaders feel Paul’s religious views are so radical that they threaten all of Judaism and possibly even threaten the world government. Interesting charges.

Paul doesn’t appear to be ruffled by all the power-players in Israel at this time and I think we can learn from Paul’s defense how we can share our faith in Jesus by sharing our own story. Or better, God’s story in us. Because that’s what our testimony is; how God changed us and led us to Himself through faith in Jesus Christ. And I think Paul’s lack of stress here is because he told his story from God’s perspective. And that makes telling our story a lot easier. Because people can’t argue that your life has changed or that its God centered. They want to argue with you about the Bible, the existence of God, the deity of Jesus for sure, but they can’t really argue with our experience with God. So how does Paul’s telling of God’s story in his life help you and me tell God’s story in our life? Let’s watch and learn.

When people have asked me how to share their testimony or when I’ve asked many of you to share God’s story in your life, I usually tell you to think of it in 3 sections. Why? Because we see it modelled for us in Scripture. And here’s a good example through Paul. How does Paul start when Herod Agrippa says ‘You are permitted to speak’. He talks about his life BC, before Christ. And again he emphasizes how God rescued him from where he was and brought him to a new place and purpose. So telling God’s story in your life,

Means Sharing Your Before Christ Life **(26:1-11)**

I call it our “before Christ” life because prior to being saved Jesus was not in our life. Now v.1 says *‘he motioned [or extended] his hand and began his defense.’* Paul was literally in chains and when he extended his hands he probably made a clanking sound. We’re not in chains when we’re talking to people yet at the same time we often feel unnecessarily defensive. And depending how people are acting towards us or have asked possibly sarcastically about our faith, we don’t need to

Feel defensive but be confident in Christ (v.1)

We know who Jesus is and we know Jesus has us. We are secure in Him. We don’t need to be smug or condescending, just be quietly confident in Christ who is the one who changed us. Paul did not allow himself to be intimidated because he knew all these people were lost. They needed Jesus and he had a unique opportunity to tell them about Jesus. Again, its Jesus’ story in us. Make Him the focus. And another thing to remember when sharing God’s amazing story in your life is

It varies with your audience (v.3)

Paul has a very Jewish religious minded audience – including Agrippa himself. Paul acknowledges this himself when he says to Agrippa

you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴ *“The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem*

There are things he can say that they will understand. He can use the common links that he has with the audience he is speaking to. If we're talking to people familiar with Jesus, God the Bible there are things we can say and use that will connect with them. If they don't have this knowledge there are other connecting points we can use. Paul says in 1 Cor. 9:19

I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings

Usually [not always] we're talking to people we know well or a little bit, enough to use a common connection that we can use in telling God's story is us. Sometimes we have to think a little harder about connecting points but also pray for ways to connect your story to common felt needs. We all want approval and acceptance. How can we know God accepts us?

And if we're belittling ourselves because we don't have an amazing, on-the-road-to Damascus God story, don't forget that

Your story is unique to, but it's also relatable (vv.4-11)

Paul begins talking about his Jewish religious background and his relentless persecution of believers at one time. Look at v.10-11;

I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

This was his back story. He thought he was pleasing God by hurting these Christians. What annoyed him so much? I think he indicates it in vv.6-9,

⁶ *And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. ⁷ This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. ⁸ Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?*

⁹ *“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*

What annoyed him so much about Jesus' people was that he was trying to earn the promise of God when followers of Jesus simply believed the promises of God as Jesus explained it and as a result they believed they knew now by faith they would be resurrected one day. Paul believed it

needed to be earned by zeal and sacrifice. 'Who do these people think they are? That you only have to believe in this Jesus fellow to know you have the security of eternal life?'

I've had a few sincere religious people get mad at me for being so "cocky" as to say we can know we have eternal life in Jesus now. But that's what Jesus said! So Paul was incensed by this and proceeded to remove these arrogant, not-even-close-to-being-righteous-like-him people. But then he met Jesus on the Damascus road.

Before we talk about Paul's unique story and belittle our boring story, some believers can relate to Paul's story. They were religious zealots, thinking they were right with God radically interrupted their life through an unusual experience or a dream or even a meeting with a humble confident believer that it annoyed them/attracted them. So Paul's story is relatable.

Your story is probably related to a biblical account. Some of you can relate to the prodigal son. Grew up in a loving, believing home but you wanted to see the world for yourself. And it didn't work out and you came back. Or maybe yours is more like a Manasseh type story where you saw Christianity modelled in your home (Hezekiah) but radically opposed this one God philosophy and explored all the options you could discover, until God humbled you through life's circumstances and you repented.

Some of you can relate to the rich young ruler – you mean we gave up all our wealth to follow Jesus (which he did not? That's only part of his story. Actually, he was a person that had a lot of blessings in life and was kind and good but he was empty. Something was missing. Some of you came to Christ that way. Or you can relate to Timothy's story. You grew up hearing the gospel from your family and you became "convinced of it for yourself" (2 Tim. 3:14). So yes, each of our stories is unique but we can also find a biblical account that we can relate to.

So we need to share with people how we got where we are today. Our before Christ life. And, as Paul now shares his Damascus road experience we too need to share

When We Fully Understood Who Jesus Is **(26:12-18)**

¹² "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

¹⁵ "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

" 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. ¹⁶ 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you

Jesus disciples' taught Jesus was the Messiah and had risen from the dead. Paul was opposed to that because he didn't accept Jesus as the Messiah and that resurrection was something later, and this faith alone message undermined Judaistic works theory.

Paul needed a radical experience to change his mind. Jesus' appearance did that! Jesus asked Paul why are you persecuting Me because to persecute Jesus' followers means to persecute Jesus. Paul understood enough that the glory of God was appearing to him by his question 'Who are you Lord?' Jesus introduces Himself and adds 'Why do you kick against the goads?'

A goad was a sharp stick used to prod the oxen when plowing. Jesus was saying, 'Paul you're going the wrong way. I am the Messiah, Lord. I live; I have risen. You are pursuing a lost cause. I want you to believe Me and serve Me.

This was when Paul first understood who Jesus was and now he was challenged with a decision. What would he do? Believe in Jesus or reject Him? When sharing our own story we need to help people know when we first understood who Jesus was, Lord and Saviour. That He died for your sins and offers us forgiveness of sins if we confess them. This is a great part of telling our story because we admit to others we aren't perfect, that we don't have it all figured out and that we're all in the same boat. We all need Jesus.

Paul believes in Jesus and that's the beginning of a new life, a new purpose in life. And this is the most important part of our story:

How the Purpose of Your Life Has Changed Since **(26:19-23)**

Here is where the real challenge comes when we first understand who Jesus is, we also understand He wants us to change the direction of our life. Paul had a purpose in life before Christ that now he had to stop pursuing if he believes in Jesus. Jesus said

I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you

And Paul explains to Agrippa, what I'm doing that I'm being charged with is obeying what Jesus told me to do which, is consistent with the Scriptures. Following Jesus means we begin to obey God's Word. This is why our life changed. And now our purpose is like Paul's, we don't want to be disobedient to the revelation of God and we want to share Jesus with whomever and wherever He leads us because we want others to have forgiveness of sins, hope and an eternal purpose in life. Not just a selfish purpose in life that never really satisfies.

This is why people will ask us about the hope that is within us; because they've seen the difference Jesus has made in us. At this point Festus interrupts Paul saying he's insane but Paul calmly says 'Not really and Agrippa knows what I'm talking about. When we've had the opportunity to share God's story in our life with others (sometimes it's a condensed version and other times we can share a longer version) then we need to

Pray for People to Respond in Belief **(26:24-32)**

Paul actually asks Agrippa for a response to the gospel and Agrippa understands what Paul is asking based on his reply that Paul thinks he can make him a Christian. But Paul was not afraid to ask for a response and so we too should be encouraged

Not to be afraid to ask for a response (vv.24-28)

What do you think about Jesus? God? Invite people to share what they think. They probably will respond as Agrippa did, somewhat skeptical or defensive. I've seen angry responses. I've seen

indifferent responses. I've seen polite denials but I've also had the joy of seeing a few respond to the truth of the gospel.

Try not to give them an ultimatum (and I suppose that has worked sometimes) but more of an invitation 'He what do you think? Can I give you a Bible to take with you? Can I encourage you to read Scripture for yourself and I will try and answer questions you might have. Maybe you'd like to talk to a friend of mine, can I pray for you?

Paul asked Agrippa for a response and his answer implies he understands what Paul is saying and when he and Festus talk privately he basically says Paul was not guilty of any crime. And sometimes when we're talking to people they may say they know what we're talking about. That they understand who Jesus is and maybe even acknowledge that God is in charge of the world or that they understand Jesus is God's Son but,

Understanding ≠ Faith (vv.29-32)

Agrippa didn't profess faith in Jesus even though he understood what Paul was saying. The rich young ruler understood what Jesus said but He didn't respond with belief. The Pharisees understood that Jesus said He was the Son of God on a few occasions but they rejected Him. Even the disciples had a head knowledge of who Jesus was but when did many of them truly believe? We don't know for sure but my guess is some didn't believe until after He rose.

Part of my own story is I grew up with the knowledge that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world. I heard the gospels share His miracles and parables. I knew the basic David/Goliath stories. I didn't doubt the existence of God but I never placed my trust in God or Jesus. I didn't realize I had to ask forgiveness for my sins individually if I wanted an ever-lasting kind of life. A life with purpose now and a secure future. Not based on my good works but on the work of Jesus on the cross for my sins.

At some point we all had that time in our life where we understood and placed our faith in Jesus. Perhaps we were scared about what people would think or what would our life look like now but we've never regretted it. We understood Heb. 11:6 where we read,

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

So what's your story? You think its boring, not to exciting to share? Thin again. It's God's story for you. He wrote your story and He thinks its exciting. It changed you for all eternity. If you've never or rarely told your story or weren't quite sure how to do it, use God's story of Paul as a guide. What were you like before Christ came into your life? What did it take for you to understand who Jesus is? How has your life changed since then?

Maybe you can relate to a Timothy or a Manasseh or an Onesimus (read Philippians) or James or Jude (Jesus' half-brothers) who saw it with their own eyes but refused to believe it until ...

Practice sharing your story with believers. Or ask others to read it. And don't feel you have to share the whole thing every time. Many times we can give people a sound bite or a trailer or draw their attention with a comment about yourself or a situation or a common interest. Jesus used parables about farming and building and family as hooks to share the Word of God. There is no shortage of ways to share God's amazing story of Jesus and His work in you. And there are is a crazy

joyful satisfaction when you talk about Jesus with others as well. Let's echo Paul's words and say 'I was not disobedient to God's Word giving me new life and purpose.'

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net