

Developing and Giving Your Witness Talk

Preparing

A good witness talk requires preparation. People who look like they are talking without benefit of notes or preparation are usually the most prepared. Most often, people take weeks to prepare, giving themselves time to think, pray, write, practice, get feedback, rewrite, and practice again. The following ideas can help you before you ever start the process of writing:

- **Know your subject matter.** Whether or not you have been given an outline or reflection questions to help you prepare, be sure to find out the following information:
 - What is the main theme of the talk?
 - What are three specific secondary themes or focuses that need to be addressed?
 - Do you need to tie the talk to a specific focus of the event at which you will give it?
 - What will the participants be doing before and after the talk?
 - Do you need to tie the talk into those activities?
- **Know how long you have.** The best witness talk is fifteen to twenty minutes long. You will have to make some good choices about what you will say and what you will not say.
- **If necessary, do some research.** If you have been asked to talk about something that goes beyond your own experience, consult others, read books or articles, search the Internet, and so on. For instance, if you have been asked to talk about Jesus and your relationship with him, you might want to read one of the Gospels so that you are familiar with the historical Jesus when you are preparing.
- **Reflect on the main theme.** Ask and answer questions related to the theme that come to your mind. Write down ideas and questions. Talk with others about your ideas. Pray! Tell God what you are thinking about and spend some time in silence to allow God to communicate with you. Let your ideas, prayers, and thoughts germinate for a while before you begin to write.
- **Consider an analogy.** You might begin with something like, "My faith life has been like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly because . . ." If you use an analogy, make sure that it helps tell your story in a meaningful way and

does not distract you. For example, if you use the caterpillar analogy, talk about life as a caterpillar, when and why you went into a cocoon state, what happened in that state to make you different, and what life is like as a butterfly. If you cannot easily do that, the analogy does not work for you, so either find a new analogy or do not use one.

- **Consider a scene from a movie or the lyrics of a song.** You can use a clip from a movie or a recording of a song, as long as it communicates what you want to say as well as or better than you could yourself. Also consider making your point by just referencing a movie scene or speaking the lyrics of a song.
- **There is no need to shock people.** Although some people have a "hit-bottom" experience that brings them to God, most come to experience God in the little things of life and through everyday experiences. Give an honest talk about your own experience, whatever that may be.

Writing

Take the time to write out your talk. That will help you find the right stories, the right details, and the images to communicate what you want. By writing it out, you can practice aloud, time your talk, and share it with others for comments and feedback. In writing your talk, remember the following points:

- Focus on a few things. If you try to say everything, you often end up saying too much, and people get lost in your words.
- Personal witness is the flesh of your talk, but you also need a skeleton. Make sure you achieve a good balance between the ideas you want to communicate (the skeleton) and the stories that bring it to life (the flesh).
- Use specific examples from your own life. Use only the necessary details to convey your message and make your point. Do not lose the message in the unnecessary details of a story.
- Plan your witness so that it flows smoothly from one point to another in a logical order.
- You can use quotations, Scripture passages, songs, and other resources when speaking, but make sure the majority of the talk comes from you.
- Do your best to witness to your faith without being preachy or giving the impression that you have it all together.
- Write as though you are telling a story to a friend.

Practicing

Practice your talk, and allow others to give you feedback. A story that you think is clear might need more details to make sense to someone else. Feedback will help you give the best possible witness talk and will help ensure that you will be understood by others.

Whenever possible, the program team for the event at which you will be speaking should listen to your witness talk and provide feedback. You should then have the opportunity to make changes and receive additional feedback. By taking time to practice with the program team, you can ensure that you have something valuable to share, and the program team can be sure the talk matches the other program elements. If this type of support is not available from the program team, find someone you trust and ask that person to work with you in preparing and practicing your talk.

Getting Ready

The final step before giving your talk is to get yourself, your notes, and your other materials ready.

- **Pray often.** When you are practicing, when you are thinking about your talk, and in the moments before giving it, pray often. If possible, ask someone to pray with you before giving your talk.
- **Write down your key points.** Most witness talks are not read. When you have practiced your talk enough times for it to be very familiar, write the key points (in words or sentences) on index cards. Some people can just write reminders of the flow from one story or idea to the next; others need an outline to work from. Remember that you may be nervous, so write down enough to remind you of what you wanted to say next, in case you forget.
- **Prepare any outside resources you are using.** Mark the page in a book, cue a song or a movie, have visuals handy, and so on.

Talking

When giving your talk, keep these hints in mind:

- Talk to the group in a relaxed and informal way. Remember that your task is to talk to and with people, not at them.
- Look at everyone and try to talk to each individual.
- Be yourself—as relaxed and natural as you can be.
- Allow your personality to come through—use your favorite phrases, laugh at your own stories, let people see the real you.
- Have confidence in yourself and in the witness that you have to share with others.