

A man in a dark suit is seen from behind, standing in front of a wall covered in hand-drawn business and communication icons. The icons include a speech bubble, a magnifying glass, a lightbulb, a bar chart, a dollar sign, an envelope, an hourglass, a lightning bolt, and various arrows. The man has his right hand on his head, suggesting a state of confusion or deep thought.

# GETTING YOUR STORY STRAIGHT

**SERIES: "INVEST & INVITE"**

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# GETTING YOUR STORY STRAIGHT

What's one of your favorite stories, and why is your chosen story a favorite?

I'm going to guess that some of the reasoning for choosing your particular story has to do with the great characters in the story, perhaps the scenery, the plotline, a unique twist in the story, or maybe it's the heartwarming ending?

Let me share with you a few things I believe every great story (including yours) has in common.

In every story, there's always a main character who wants something, (the character might not even be a person, it could be an inanimate object, like a mountain). This character faces several trials and obstacles trying to get that

thing. At the end of the story, the main character (or it) either gets what he/she/it seeking and has resolution, or doesn't and learns something new in the process. Did I nail it?

It's the before and after approach to telling a story. "Here's who I was before I experienced this event, here's what happened during the event, and here's who I am after I experienced this event."

If you think about it, this "Before & After" storytelling principle can serve you well when it comes to sharing your faith with people in your life who are far from God.

The truth is that there are many great Christian books and videos out there that do a great job on

teaching you how to share the gospel. What I want to focus in on with this message is a simple conversational approach that will help you tell the story of what Jesus Christ has done in your life.

Now before we get there, let's talk about some bad habits that might hinder your story from being received. Though God can work through even the most awkward presentations of the Gospel, you and I NEED NOT go out of our way to make those conversations any more painful, uncomfortable than they need to be.

So let me share with you **four** things that can rob your story from having a spiritual impact on those you share it with. (For the rest of this section, I have borrowed heavily from **Bill Hybel's** book, "**Just Walk Across the Room.**")

## 01. LONG-WINDEDNESS

One of the big mistakes many of us make when it comes to sharing God's work in our lives is talking too much and not listening enough. This happens when we concern ourselves more with quoting the right passages, and talking about our life than we are about actually engaging the other person in

meaningful interactive conversation.

When you're sitting or standing across from someone you're sharing your faith with, pay attention to body cues. You'll usually be able to tell if they have disengaged. Whether they start crossing their arms, inhaling deeply, checking their cell phones, or are continually looking away, those are all hints that they are no longer engaged.

The key to effectively sharing what Christ has done in you is to keep your story brief and interesting. Give them just enough high points in your story so that they're the ones' asking, "wait, so when and how did that happen?" (For my Calvinistic brothers and sisters who are losing their minds right now thinking, "body language is irrelevant, those whom God has predestined WILL come." I feel ya! But might I just point out that God's foreknowledge of one's salvation doesn't remove the need for clear communication on our parts.)

## 02. INCOHERENCE

Have you ever had someone begin telling you a story, only to get lost in the middle of it, but attempt to

come back by telling you a bunch of disconnected stories?

That's frustrating isn't it? I know that YOU KNOW God has done all kinds of amazing things in your life that you want to share, fine! Pick one story and stick to it. In fact, having one clear plotline is the key to great storytelling. Approach it this way; This is what happened - here's what got in the way - here's how it was resolved.

### **03.** **“CHRISTIANESE”**

Some of us in here speak this language all too well. It's when we use religious jargon to communicate something that really should be simple. So when someone asks us how things are going with a specific area of our lives, we'll say things like, “God has been good and I'm just letting Him lead me by His Spirit” which essentially means, “I am totally clueless about what to do with my life right now and I don't think God is going to answer me on this one!” Or we'll say things about other people like, “I feel unsettled in my Spirit about this person but the Lord is teaching me patience” which essentially means, “I can't stand that jerk and I'm trying not to go postal on them!”

Language like this may make sense to other Christians in your church, but most non-Christians have no clue what words like, “fellowshipping”, “walking with the Lord” or “led by the Spirit” mean. Think simple, so the other person feels like they understood every word you just said!

### **04. RELIGIOUS SUPERIORITY**

This is the worst and perhaps even most inexcusable. It's when we approach people who don't share our faith with an air of arrogance around us. It happens when the main message of our story is more about them changing their behavior than it is about inviting them to meet Jesus who died for their sins and forgave them.

In fact, what ends up being conveyed is that, if only they would change their behaviors and be more like US, then God would find them more acceptable.

This is certainly not the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are certainly more subtle messages that can distract from the main story we should be telling, but those are the 4 that came to mind,

(with great help from Hybel's book).

A better approach however is to think of your own personal God-story in terms of "Before and After."

- Who and what were you like before you met Jesus?
- How did you come to believe in Jesus and what did He do in your life?
- How has your life changed since you became a follower of Jesus Christ?

Simple and straightforward.

Let me give you a few Biblical examples from the gospel. In John 9, Jesus miraculously heals a man who has been blind from birth. The man is obviously ecstatic about his restored vision and a crowd gathers to hear his story. The religious leaders get wind of it and are deeply upset because Jesus worked on a Sunday. They want to discredit Him, so they call the blind man to interrogate him about the true identity of Jesus. They want to prove that Jesus is a fake and a sinner like everyone else.

But instead of engaging in a drawn out spiel about how much he had prayed and hoped for healing, the formerly blind man chose one simple before-and-after story. In John 9:25 he sums up his story this

way, "Whether he [Jesus] is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" I might add that what really sold this testimony was the fact that there were people there who could testify that he had in fact previously been blind from birth.

In another account in John 8, a woman is caught in adultery and a crowd has gathered, getting ready to stone her to death for her apparent crime. They bring her to Jesus expecting Him to contradict His teachings by approving her execution, but He confounds their logic with this statement, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." (John 8:7).

One by one, the crowds drop their rock and walk away because they are just as guilty as the woman they are accusing of breaking the law. Once they're all disappeared, Jesus walks up to the woman, straightens her up and asks, "[Lady] Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Let me ask you this, when this woman tells her story of what God has done in her, which parts of her testimony do you think she's going to focus on? She would more than likely tell the before and after of

that event. So it might sound like this, “I almost lost my life because of a foolish decision I made to find comfort in a married man’s arms, but then Jesus literally saved me, and forgave me, now I live my life solely to honor him”

This principle should hold true for you too.

When you tell your story, the critical contrast to draw for someone is this: What difference has Jesus Christ really made in your life? In other words, what were you like before Christ? How did you come to faith in Christ? And now, what are you like after you’ve asked Jesus Christ to intervene in your life? No need to tell them about that time the Holy Spirit empowered you to cast out a demon out of your roommate or that time Jesus spoke to you through an episode of *Housewives of New Jersey*.

## MY PERSONAL GOD-STORY

So let me help you out by sharing my story. It’s not perfect, but in light of my personal experiences, here’s what my before and after story sounds like.

Earlier in life, I was a typical troubled youth. I struggled with my

grades, struggled with communication, got in constant fights and came home regularly with suspension slips from school. I even managed to get myself expelled from Junior high. It didn’t help much that my siblings were brilliant straight A students, which gave my parents something to constantly compare myself to. So I grew up with a very bleak view of my future.

But then, in 1989 when I was in junior high, one of my friends invited me to youth group and it was there that I heard about Jesus Christ, His forgiveness of all my sins, (of which I had plenty), and **THE FACT THAT I COULD START A CLEAN SLATE WITH GOD**. Frankly it was a no-brainer for me. In light of all my youth-troubles, Jesus Christ seemed like my greatest friend, and so at age 13, I put my faith in Jesus Christ.

Almost immediately, my life began to take on new meaning and purpose. Knowing that God loved me in spite of my perceived failures set a strong foundation for me to begin approaching relationships and responsibilities with a sense that **IT WAS** possible for me to succeed. Though some areas of my life are still a battle, I can truly say that because of my faith in Jesus Christ, in all that I set my mind to do today, I truly feel an incredible

sense of fulfillment and accomplishment.”

That’s my story! It’s not perfect, nor is it the full picture of what God has done in me, but **IT’S THE STORY I LEAD IN WITH** when I am presented with an opportunity to share why it is I am so jazzed about God.

Now it’s your turn! Below are three sections, each with 3 questions. Working through them will help you come up with your before and after story.

## **BEFORE CHRIST:**

Describe your lifestyle, attitudes, needs or problems before you put your faith in Christ.

- Were you fulfilled?
- What were your struggles?
- What did you pursue?

## **MEETING CHRIST:**

How did you come to faith in Christ?

- When and how did you first hear about Jesus?
- Who played a role in introducing you to Jesus?
- What “clicked” in you and led you to trust in Jesus?

## **AFTER CHRIST:**

How has your life changed since you placed your faith in Jesus Christ? (It doesn’t have to be an over the top dramatic story).

- What were some immediate changes?
- What do you no longer struggle with or are gradually letting go?
- How are you motivated differently?

Now here’s what I’d like you to do. When you’re done writing your story, find a close Christian friend and share it with them for practice. Allow them to give you some input if they have any. Then the next step is to pick out one name on your list of **FAITHFUL TO FIVE** (from the other message in this 2-part series) you’ve been praying for.

Share your story with them, and then invite them the following weekend to come to Church with you and experience the message of the gospel with you.

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