

SHARING YOUR LIFE MESSAGE

(Excerpt from *What On Earth Am I Here For?* By Dr. R. Warren)

Those who believe in the son of God have the testimony of God in them. -1John 5:10a (GWT)

*Your lives are echoing the Master's word ... The news of your faith in God is out.
We don't even have to say anything anymore -you're the message! -1Thessalonians 1:8 (Msg)*

God has given you a Life Message to share. When you became a believer, you also became God's messenger. God wants to speak to the world through you. Paul said, *"We speak the truth before God, as messengers of God."* You may feel you don't have anything to share, but that's the Devil trying to keep you silent. You have a storehouse of experiences that God wants to use to bring others into his family. The Bible says, *"Those who believe in the Son of God have the testimony of God in them."*

Your Life Message has four parts to it:

- Your *testimony*: the story of how you began a relationship with Jesus
- Your *life lessons*: the most important lessons God has taught you
- Your *godly passions*: the issues God shaped you to care about most
- The *Good News*: the message of salvation

YOUR LIFE MESSAGE INCLUDES YOUR TESTIMONY.

Your testimony is the story of how Christ has made a difference in your life. Peter tells us that we were chosen by God *"to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you."* This is the essence of witnessing—simply sharing your personal experiences regarding the Lord. In a courtroom, a witness isn't expected to argue the case, prove the truth, or press for a verdict; that is the job of attorneys. Witnesses simply report what happened to them or what they saw.

Jesus said, *"You will be my witnesses,"* not *"You will be my attorney."* He wants you to share your story with others. Sharing your testimony is an essential part of your mission on earth because it is unique. There is no other story just like yours, so only you can share it. If you don't share it, it will be lost forever. You may not be a Bible scholar, but you *are* the authority on your life, and it's hard to argue with personal experience. Actually, your personal testimony is more effective than a sermon, because unbelievers see pastors as professional salesmen, but see you as a "satisfied customer," so they give you more credibility.

Personal stories are also easier to relate to than principles, and people love to hear them. They capture our attention, and we remember them longer. Unbelievers would probably lose interest if you started quoting theologians, but they have a natural curiosity about experiences they've never had. Shared stories build a relational bridge that Jesus can walk across from your heart to theirs.

Another value of your testimony is that it bypasses intellectual defenses. Many people who won't accept the authority of the Bible will listen to a humble, personal story. That is why on six different occasions Paul used his testimony to share the gospel instead of quoting Scripture. The Bible says, *'Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect.'* The best way to "be ready" is to write out your testimony and then memorize the main points.

Divide it into four parts:

1. What my life was like before I met Jesus
2. How I realized I needed Jesus
3. How I committed my life to Jesus
4. The difference Jesus has made in my life

Of course, you have many other testimonies besides your salvation story. You have a story for *every* experience in which God has helped you. You should make a list of all the problems, circumstances, and crises that God has brought you through. Then be sensitive and use the story that your unbelieving friend will relate to best. Different situations call for different testimonies.

YOUR LIFE MESSAGE INCLUDES YOUR LIFE LESSONS.

The second part of your life message is the truths that God has taught you from experiences with him. These are lessons and insights you have learned about God, relationships, problems, temptations, and other aspects of life. David prayed, *"God, teach me lessons for living so I can stay the course."* Sadly, we never learn from a lot that happens to us. Of the Israelites, the Bible says, *"Over and over God rescued them, but they never learned—until finally their sins destroyed them."* You have probably met people like that.

While it is wise to learn from experience, it is *wiser* to learn from the experiences of others.

There isn't enough time to learn everything in life by trial and error. We must learn from the life lessons of one another. The Bible says, *"A warning given by an experienced person to someone willing to listen is more valuable than ... jewelry made of the finest gold."*

Shared stories build a relational bridge that Jesus can walk across from your heart to others.

Write down the major life lessons you have learned so you can share them with others. We should be grateful Solomon did this, because it gave us the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, which are filled with practical lessons on living. Imagine how much needless frustration could be avoided if we learned from each other's life lessons.

Mature people develop the habit of extracting lessons from everyday experiences. I urge you to make a list of your life lessons. You haven't really thought about them unless you have written them down.

Here are a few questions to jog your memory and get you started:

- What has God taught me from failure?
- What has God taught me from a lack of money?
- What has God taught me from pain or sorrow or depression?
- What has God taught me through waiting?
- What has God taught me through illness?

- What has God taught me from disappointment?
- What have I learned from my family, my church, my relationships, my small group, and my critics?

YOUR LIFE MESSAGE INCLUDES SHARING YOUR GODLY PASSIONS.

God is a passionate God. He passionately *loves* some things and passionately *hates* other things. As you grow closer to him, he will give you a passion for something he cares about deeply so you can be a spokesman for him in the world. It may be a passion about a problem, a purpose, a principle, or a group of people.

Whatever it is, you will feel compelled to speak up about it and do what you can to make a difference.

You cannot keep yourself from talking about what you care about most. Jesus said, *"A man's heart determines his speech."* Two examples are David, who said, *"My zeal for God and his work burns hot within me,"* and Jeremiah, who said, *"Your message burns in my heart and bones, and I cannot keep silent."*

God gives some people a godly passion to champion a cause. It's often a problem they personally experienced such as abuse, addiction, infertility, depression, a disease, or some other difficulty. Sometimes God gives people a passion to speak up for a group of others who can't speak for themselves: the unborn, the persecuted, the poor, the imprisoned, the mistreated, the disadvantaged, and those who are denied justice. The Bible is filled with commands to defend the defenseless.

God uses passionate people to further his kingdom. He may give you a godly passion for starting new churches, strengthening families, funding Bible translations, or training Christian leaders. You may be given a godly passion for reaching a particular group of people with the gospel: businessmen, teenagers, foreign exchange students, young mothers, or those with a particular hobby or sport. If you ask God, he will burden your heart for a specific country or ethnic group that desperately needs a strong Christian witness.

God gives us different passions so that everything he wants done in the world will get done.

You should not expect everyone else to be passionate about your passion. Instead, we must listen to and value each other's life message because nobody can say it all. Never belittle someone else's godly passion. The Bible says, *"It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good."* God gives us different passions so that everything he wants done in the world will get done.

YOUR LIFE MESSAGE INCLUDES THE GOOD

News. What is the Good News? *"The Good News shows how God makes people right with himself-that it begins and ends with faith."* *"For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others."* The Good News is that when we trust God's grace to save us through what Jesus did, our sins are forgiven, we get a purpose for living, and we are promised a future home in heaven.

There are hundreds of great books on how to share the Good News. I can provide a list of books that have been helpful to me (see appendix 2). But all the training in the world won't motivate you to witness for Christ until you internalize the eight convictions covered in the previous chapter. Most important, you must learn to love lost people the way God does.

God has never made a person he didn't love. Everybody matters to him. When Jesus stretched his arms out wide on the cross, he was saying, "I love you *this* much!" The Bible says, *"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all."* Whenever you feel apathetic about your mission in the world, spend some time thinking about what Jesus did for you on the cross.

We must care about unbelievers because God does. Love leaves no choice. The Bible says, *"There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear."* A parent will run into a burning building to save a child because their love for that child is greater than their fear. If you've been afraid to share the Good News with those around you, ask God to fill your heart with his love for them. The Bible says, *"[God] does not want anyone to be lost, but he wants all people to change their hearts and lives."* As long as you know one person who doesn't know Christ, you *must* keep praying for them, serving them in love, and sharing the Good News. And as long as there is one person in your community who isn't in the family of God, your church *must* keep reaching out.

The church that doesn't want to grow is saying to the world, "You can go to hell."

What are *you* willing to do so that the people you know will go to heaven? Invite them to church? Share your story? Give them this book?

Take them a meal? Pray for them every day until they are saved? Your mission field is all around you. Don't miss the opportunities God is giving you. The Bible says, *"Make the most of your chances to tell others the Good News. Be wise in all your contacts with them."*

Is anyone going to be in heaven because of you? Will anyone in heaven be able to say to you, "I want to thank you. I'm here because you cared enough to share the Good News with me"?

Imagine the joy of greeting people in heaven whom you helped get there. The eternal salvation of a single soul is more important than anything else you will ever achieve in life. Only people are going to last forever. In this book you have learned God's five purposes for your life on earth: He made you to be a *member* of his family, a *model* of his character, a *magnifier* of his glory, a *minister* of his grace, and a *messenger* of his Good News to others. Of these five purposes, the fifth can *only* be done on earth. The other four you will keep doing in eternity in some way. That's why spreading the Good News is so important; you only have a short time to share your life message and fulfill your mission.

THINKING ABOUT MY PURPOSE

Point to Ponder: God wants to say something to the world through me.

Verse to Remember: *Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect."* 1 Peter 3:15b-16 (TEV)

Question to Consider: As I reflect on my personal story, who does God want me to share it with?