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## Telling Your Story

‘I’m Alan – do you remember me? You led me to faith in Jesus ten years ago just outside Cambridge.’

I had never forgotten that evening. I had been a student then, and one November night the college Christian group had sent three of us out to a nearby locality in what was called a ‘Team of Witness’. Roy Levenson – then studying for church ordination – was leader. ‘Just tell your stories of beginning with Christ,’ he told his two teammates, David Watson and myself. For me it was the start of a long friendship with David Watson, who was to become an outstanding church pastor and evangelist of the future.

But neither David (who had only just come to belief himself) nor I had ever done anything like this before. ‘Just tell your story!’ explained Roy. *‘Three things!’* You say something about life before you came to Christ, then when and how you came to the great Decision and finally the difference that knowing Christ has made!

I began to think it through. Why, it had happened for me only five years earlier, during a week of summer activities run by the Scripture Union for about a hundred of us

teenagers in the English county of Dorset. The attraction for me was the tennis coaching – under a Wimbledon player by the name of Douglas Argyle.

### **A personal decision**

It being a Christian event, prayers were held every morning and evening – and I could cope with that... until the day when one of the leaders came up to me. ‘Come for a walk, Richard!’ I sensed danger, but could only comply. Sure enough, my mentor eventually worked round to his question: Had I ever accepted Christ into my life?

I lied. ‘Oh yes, I’ve done that!’

– ‘That’s great! When was that?’

I thought rapidly. ‘About two years ago.’ It sounded like a reasonably safe enough time to have elapsed.

– ‘Wonderful! And how did that come about?’

I took a deep breath, and invented a little story, making it up as I went along. Having been brought up in a missionary family, I knew the language well enough! Honour seemed satisfied; the man was happy enough – and I’d got him off my back.

But it was during those very days that my personal decision was indeed made, as I listened to a man called Mr Nash, speaking at the evening prayers. At one point in his talk, he began to refer to the Cross of Jesus Christ, and opened his Bible at Isaiah 53, verse 6:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (KJV)

Mr Nash closed his Bible and placed it on his left hand. ‘Now,’ he said, ‘we can read the sentence in this way. Suppose this left hand represents you and me, in all our sinfulness and rebellion against God. And suppose that this black

object represents the weight and penalty of our unforgiven sins, crushing us down.

‘And suppose that my *right* hand here represents Christ, in all His purity and goodness.... and then suppose’ – and Mr Nash looked up at the electric light above him – ‘that the *light* there represents God in all His love, and desire to forgive us.... NOW we can read the sentence like this:

‘All we like sheep have gone astray;’ the speaker was looking at his left hand, ‘we have turned every one to his own way, and the LORD’ – Mr Nash looked up – ‘hath laid on *Him* the iniquity of us all.’ By then the Bible on the left hand had swiftly been transferred to the right hand. The left hand was now empty.

Mr Nash looked at us all. ‘Now where are your sins?’ he smiled. I got the point immediately. The responsibility of the world’s sins had now been taken by Christ – who had died for me. Eternal forgiveness could be mine. I also learnt that Christ, now raised from the dead, could be my unseen Companion, giving me power for daily living.... if that was what I wanted. *And I did want it.* All that remained for me actually to do was to thank the Lord for coming to me in love – and then personally to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord.

*Tonight I’m going to do exactly what that man says,* I silently resolved. Nothing was going to stop me. I waited until the end-of-day banter and laughs were all over. Then in bed, I sat up and prayed, admitting that I was sorry for having kept Christ out of my life until now. I thanked Him for dying for *my* sins, and opened the door of my will for Him to be Lord of my life from then on.

\* \* \*

Now at college, so much had happened since that night five years earlier, and I resolved to try to get some of my story

across. I made some notes on a piece of paper, rehearsed – and prayed. Then we set off for the village hall.

It was at the close of the meeting that the young man in Britain's Royal Air Force approached me.

'I'd like to know more.'

It was Alan. I had never before consciously led someone to personal faith. We sometimes call it *The Way of Salvation*.

### **The bad news, the good news**

There's the *Bad News*, I explained to Alan: that rebellion against our Creator describes every one of us, and that we are not fit for God's presence in this life or the life to come. There was the *Good News*, I went on to say – that God in Jesus came to us in love through His Son's death on the Cross for our sins – so offering us free forgiveness and friendship with Him for ever. And there's *The Way In*, I challenged – as men and women repent of their sins and personally accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and go on, empowered by His Spirit, to live effectively for Him.

Something of this must stumblingly have got across to Alan as we chatted. Then for a while he stayed silent, head down, and finally lifted his gaze. 'I've accepted Jesus into my life,' he declared.

Later that night, I could hardly sleep for wonder. *I could die right now*, I thought. *For the first time ever, I've publicly told my little story and astoundingly it's been used to tip someone into Christ's kingdom.*

Yet there are plenty of people who, across the years, have lastingly touched the lives of many for God, without ever consciously leading someone through 'the Way of Salvation'. There need be no guilt trip about this, for there is no neat and tightly practised formula by which someone must come to faith. As Augustine put it sixteen centuries ago, '*One loving spirit sets another on fire.*' At a Christian 'outreach' party once

in London, I was speaking with a man of another religion. 'So what brings you here?' I asked.

He pointed at a young man across the room. 'I'm only here because of *him*. The way he lives and speaks has got through to me, and I've come to find out what it is that makes him different from me.'

Let's also establish that there are believers – like the late Ruth Graham, wife of the famous evangelist – whose personal 'story' is that from childhood they were brought up to know and follow Christ; they never knew anything else. So a precise 'before and after' pattern has not always been typical for them. Yet their story is of Christ at the centre of their lives!

### **Everybody has a story**

What then is *your* story? Everybody has a story, and Christian believers do well to think through, analyse, and even prepare and *rehearse* their stories – for that occasion when, with a friend, we can naturally 'give the reason for the hope that is within us' (1 Pet. 3:15, KJV).

Or indeed for that occasion when we are asked to get up in public at the front! This need not be too frightening. First, your story can be naturally drawn out of you in interview-style.

*TIP:* Work out beforehand whether there is some Scripture sentence that has particularly meant a lot to you and to which you can draw attention at some point. You need not preach a sermon about it, for this is not the point at which you must put out a strong 'appeal'; that can be left for whoever gives a further address in the programme. This is simply your 'story'.

Alternatively, you may be asked to stand up front and give a three-minute address. *TIP:* Make some notes on a piece of paper. But not on a large attention-deflecting

sheet! It can be done well enough with a small, business-like ring pad, measuring perhaps five inches by four.

And the Roy Leverson instruction is *right*, time and again. **Before.... What Happened.... the Difference** it has made. Others have done it ahead of you! Read the whole of chapter 26 in the book of Acts, and you will see this pattern in the personal account given by the apostle Paul as he stood before King Agrippa.

### **It's our story of Christ**

We can also see from Paul's words that his story was a story of CHRIST in his life. That is the whole point. If Christ is in your story, and if there are those prayerfully supporting you as you give it, you can expect that heaven will use it!

I shall never forget an outreach evening service at the English parish church of St Peter's, Harold Wood, Romford. As leader of the congregation at that time, I had invited the church treasurer to tell his story as part of the service. He was a short man, with spectacles, called Peter Haigh. His could have been described as a non-dramatic, simple account of entering into Christian discipleship. He had never given it before; indeed, he had never spoken as a Christian in public before.

During the service my attention was riveted by the presence, near one of the church pillars, of a visitor – the deputy headmaster of a nearby comprehensive school. I had met him before, outside the life of the church, and he was formidable. Agnostic, intellectual, cynical – and with a rasping voice that could cut down all opposition – he had no problems with discipline from his pupils. Evidently, a colleague had brought him along. As one of his pupils who was present said to me afterwards, 'When I saw him there, I thought, "It looks like him but it can't be." And then I realised it *was* !'



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Two days later, I heard that the deputy head had become a Christian that very night. It seemed unbelievable. Finally, I caught up with him.

‘It wasn’t so much your sermon,’ he explained. ‘It was that man whom you got up at the front to tell his story. And while he was speaking, I could *feel* the whole congregation pulling for him, wanting him to do well. I had never experienced such a thing in all my life. That’s what turned me over. So I’ve accepted Jesus Christ and become a Christian.’ We watched my new friend’s life changing; the whole church became aware of what seemed like a miracle.

Think about it, then. When you are asked to tell your story in public, *you won’t be alone*. You are likely to have a bunch of supporters all around you, who have been praying ahead for that moment when you totter to the front and begin to speak of Christ in your life! And you can believe that, by His unseen Spirit, His pledged presence will be right beside you.

