

Chapter 14

Your Story Isn't Just Yours

Most families have stories that exist only in someone's memory. There is the job that almost wasn't accepted, the move that changed everything, the financial season no one wants to repeat, or the prayer that seemed impossible. Some stories are told so often that everyone knows them. Others remain private because the person who lived them never imagined anyone would be interested.

When that person dies, details can disappear. A few pieces may survive, but much of the meaning may die with the person who understood what happened. An opportunity can be lost as well: the chance to hear how someone we love experienced God's mercy and learned to trust Him.

We can spend decades walking with Jesus and assume our children, grandchildren, or friends understand why our faith matters to us. They may know we attend church, read Scripture, and pray. They may even share our faith. But do they know about the season when we were afraid? Have they heard about where we failed and how grace met us there? Do they know why a particular passage of Scripture has become precious to us?

Those stories may be among the most valuable things we can give. In the previous chapter, we considered how to share wisdom. Here, we begin preserving the story behind that wisdom. You do not need to write an autobiography or turn private memories into a public account. Begin with something true that could help someone else see Jesus more clearly.

The Difference Between a Résumé and a Testimony

A résumé presents evidence of our competence. We select accomplishments, positions, and skills to help others assess what we can do. A Christian testimony serves a different purpose. It tells how we have come to know and follow Christ and how we have experienced His grace along the way. Our obedience and decisions belong in the account, but they do not tell the whole story.

A testimony can include weakness, confusion, sin, waiting, and circumstances beyond our control. Years sometimes help us recognize what was hard to see while we were living through them. At thirty, we may have seen only the job we lost. At sixty, we may recognize how that loss redirected us. A season of financial pressure may have exposed pride or taught us to accept another person's help. At the time, we saw the door closed. Later, we may see where the hallway led.

Not every painful event ultimately makes sense. We should resist imposing tidy explanations on suffering simply because time has passed. We may carry some questions for the rest of our earthly lives. Faith does not require us to pretend otherwise. We may be able to describe the help we

received or the truth that sustained us, even as we admit we do not understand why the suffering occurred.

The center of Christian testimony is more secure than our ability to explain events. It is Jesus Christ and the grace we receive through Him. Paul speaks of God's saving grace revealed in Christ, who overcame death and brought life to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:9–10). When we tell our story, we want people to understand whom we trust. A sequence of fortunate events alone does not explain that faith, and a painful sequence does not disprove it.

Go Home and Tell Them

Mark 5 records a dramatic encounter between Jesus and a man living among the tombs. Mark identifies his torment as the work of unclean spirits and describes others' failed attempts to restrain him. Jesus delivered him. When people arrived afterward, they found him "sitting down, clothed and in his right mind" (Mark 5:15, NASB 2020).

As Jesus prepared to leave, the man begged to accompany Him. Jesus gave him another assignment:

"Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you." — Mark 5:19 (NASB 2020)

The man went and told what Jesus had done for him. The center of his account was the mercy he had received. He had something to tell the people who knew him because Jesus had met his need.

Our stories may be far less dramatic, yet that emphasis can still guide us. We can speak plainly about what happened and gratefully about the Lord's mercy. The assignment Jesus gave this man does not require us to imitate the details of his experience. It directs our attention to the One whose work made the story worth telling.

Mercy Changes the Center of the Story

Most of us naturally describe events from our own perspective. We explain what happened to us, what we decided, and how we responded. There is nothing wrong with that. We were there. But testimony invites us to look beyond our own efforts to notice the care we received, the correction we needed, and the grace we could not give ourselves.

Perhaps another believer's generosity helped your family through a difficult season. Perhaps Scripture challenged a decision you were trying to justify. Maybe someone stayed with you when grief made ordinary responsibilities hard to manage. Naming those people and moments can help a listener understand what you mean when you say God sustained you.

We should also distinguish what happened from our understanding of why it happened. We may believe a closed opportunity spared us from something unwise, even if we do not know all that God intended. We can say, “Looking back, I am grateful that this did not work out,” without claiming to know every reason it was withheld. When we remain uncertain, honest language serves the story better than a confident explanation we cannot substantiate.

A mature testimony does not manufacture certainty. “I still do not understand why this happened” may belong beside “Here is how I was helped.” Sometimes we can readily speak of God’s nearness. At other times, we may need to say we struggled to feel it and kept turning to His promises. The listener does not need a polished version of our experience. He needs the truth, offered with humility and hope.

Tell About Failure With Care

We want our children and grandchildren to respect us, and admitting failure can feel costly. We may prefer to preserve only the parts of our history that present us favorably. Yet an account in which we were always wise offers little help to someone who discovers how far short he falls.

Someone may benefit from hearing about a time when work became too important or when pride kept us from accepting good advice. We can describe what we did, whom we harmed, and what repentance required. We can also acknowledge the consequences that remain. Grace is not diminished by telling the truth about the damage; nor does forgiveness require a story in which everything is restored to its previous state.

Honesty still requires discretion. Not every detail belongs to every audience. A young child should not be asked to carry an adult burden. A story about marriage belongs in part to the other spouse, and a story about our own failure may expose someone else’s private suffering. Consider what is yours to tell, what permission is needed, and what can be omitted without misleading the listener. A private draft can include reflections that do not belong in a shared version.

Telling a testimony must not take the place of an apology we owe. The person we hurt may need us to listen, take responsibility, and make appropriate reparations before he is ready to hear our account of what we learned. Our desire to describe God’s work does not entitle us to control someone else’s account of the same events.

The purpose is to help another person see grace at work in a truthful life. We can admit that Christians fall short and demonstrate what it means to turn back to Christ. That may give someone the courage to seek help for his own sin rather than hide it behind an appearance of success.

The Stories the Next Generation Needs

Psalm 78 describes a responsibility that extends beyond a single generation:

“We will not conceal them from their children, But we will tell the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His power and His wondrous works that He has done.” — Psalm 78:4 (NASB 2020)

The psalm recounts God’s dealings with Israel and calls His people to teach the coming generation to trust Him, remember His works, and obey His commands. Its concern extends beyond preserving a family’s memories. As we considered in Chapter 8, our personal stories belong alongside the teaching of what God has revealed; they do not replace that teaching.

That distinction helps us tell our stories faithfully. We can explain how a passage of Scripture corrected us or how we learned to depend on God during a difficult season. We should not turn our experience into a promise that another person will receive the same outcome. A story of provision can encourage gratitude without implying that every unpaid bill will be paid in the same way. A story of reconciliation can offer hope without promising that every relationship will be repaired.

The next generation may include our children and grandchildren, but it is not limited to them. Friends, younger believers, and those we serve may also welcome an account of God’s faithfulness. If family relationships are distant or strained, there is no need to force a story into an unwelcome conversation. Preserve it with care and remain attentive to an appropriate opportunity to share it.

The Danger of Making Ourselves the Hero

As we retell events, we can gradually make our decisions seem more obvious and our motives cleaner than they were. Humility helps us resist that temptation. We can acknowledge that we did not know what we were doing, that our wife saw what we missed, or that a friend’s counsel prevented a mistake. Giving others their due in the account makes it more truthful.

Memory also has limits. When a date or detail matters, consult a letter, photograph, journal, or another person’s recollection, if available. If you are unsure, say so. Do not invent dialogue to make a scene more vivid or present a remembered impression as an exact record. When people remember an event differently, there may be room to acknowledge the difference rather than insist that one account captures everything.

God’s faithfulness does not make us the hero. If listeners see something admirable in our lives, we can receive it graciously. But our greater hope is that the story helps them recognize His mercy and consider what it means to trust Him. We do not need to exaggerate our distress, our sin, or our eventual success to make that happen.

Jesus First in Our Story

Our governing order remains **Jesus > Others > Self**. When self comes first, storytelling easily becomes reputation management. We select details to protect an image and explain away anything that threatens it. When Jesus comes first, we can be more honest because our worth is secure in Him. We want our account to reflect His grace, patience, correction, and mercy.

Putting others before ourselves changes how we approach the audience. We ask what the person can understand and what might help them, rather than how much of our history we can fit into the conversation. We leave room for questions and do not use the story to demand agreement, forgiveness, or a decision. Selfless love includes listening to the person we are sharing with.

We remain in the story because it is our experience. Our choices matter, and we should neither excuse our wrongs nor pretend that obedience requires no effort. But we tell these things as people who have needed Jesus and still do. The story becomes an offering of gratitude rather than a defense of our importance.

Ordinary Faithfulness Is Worth Remembering

Some men hesitate because they lack a spectacular conversion, a miraculous rescue, or a dramatic turning point to share. They may have come to faith as children and grown in understanding over many years. Their story may include steady work, care for family, faithful friends, and repeated returns to Scripture after seasons of distraction.

Those are stories worth preserving. Describe the ordinary ways you learned to pray, the person who patiently answered your questions, or the change you began to notice as you learned to listen. A testimony need not borrow drama from someone else's life. Small details can help another person understand how faith took shape in your ordinary days.

At the same time, a long marriage, steady income, or good health should not be used to test whether God has been gracious. Some faithful people have experienced divorce, poverty, serious illness, or losses they could not prevent. Their stories belong, too. The question is how we have known and followed Christ in the life we actually received.

The Story We Tell With Our Lives

Our conduct gives people another account of what we believe. A spouse sees how we respond to frustration. A coworker notices whether we take responsibility for an error. Younger believers may learn from how we disagree and how we receive correction. When our words about Jesus are accompanied by patience, honesty, and care, the two accounts begin to align.

This does not impose a new requirement to practice Christianity perfectly. We will need to apologize and begin again. Sometimes that response communicates more than any effort to protect our reputation ever could. Nor should the effects of illness or diminished capacity be mistaken for a simple measure of spiritual maturity. Our dependence on grace endures through every season.

One of my hopes for REMAINING is that the story our lives tell becomes increasingly consistent with the story our mouths tell. We want to keep responding to Jesus now, even as we remember what He has done. Our testimony is not only something we preserve but also something we continue to live out.

Your Remaining Years Plan

My Testimony

Begin with one account you can write or record. The five movements below can help you organize it; they are prompts, not a required conversion formula. If you came to faith as a child or cannot pinpoint a decisive date, tell that truth. You can describe gradual growth without inventing a dramatic before-and-after story.

Gather the Story

Before or in the early days — What did I understand about Jesus, and what did my life and faith look like then?

Turning points — What events, people, or passages of Scripture helped shape my direction or understanding?

Grace — Where can I describe mercy, correction, provision, or sustaining help? What remains unresolved?

Lessons — What have I learned, and how does Scripture help me understand what I have learned?

The message — What do I hope this account helps someone understand about Jesus and about trusting Him?

Begin in Your Own Voice

Choose one thread from your notes and write a few connected paragraphs. Describe what happened, how you responded, and what you can honestly say about God’s work and the truth that sustained or corrected you. Include what remains unfinished. If recording is easier, use these prompts to make a short recording and note where it is saved.

A working title and the period of life this account covers:

My Testimony:

Continue on additional pages or in a separate document as needed. If someone helps you record or write, review the result together to ensure the words remain yours. You do not need to finish the whole story in one sitting.

Preserve and Share With Care

Read or listen to your work. Check key details, distinguish between what you know and what you infer, and consider the intended audience’s privacy and maturity. Keep a private version if needed and prepare a version for sharing.

Details to check, uncertainties to acknowledge, or permission to seek:

Where I will keep the account and a backup, with a clear title and date:

Who may receive it and who should know where the shareable copy is kept:

One Thing I Will Begin

Within the next seven days, take one step: start the draft, make a recording, or invite someone to hear a story you are already ready to share. Choose the step that fits your current situation. If someone welcomes the story, give them room to ask questions and respond in their own way.

The story, person, and next action I have chosen:

I will take that step by:

I will review or add to this testimony on:

During that review, ask whether the account is truthful, clear, considerate of others, and centered on the Lord you trust. Note what you want to preserve next. A completed, carefully kept story is a worthwhile start; you do not need to record every memory.

The Story Is Still Being Written

Writing about the past can make us speak as if the story were finished. It is not. There may still be people to encourage, responsibilities to fulfill, and ways to serve that we have not yet considered. There may also be difficult seasons ahead. The testimony we write today may gain chapters we would never choose.

Paul's confidence in 2 Timothy 1:8–12 was expressed amid suffering for the gospel. His trust rested in the One he believed in, not in the ability to control events. That is the kind of confidence we hope our stories convey. We do not know what lies ahead, yet we can continue to entrust ourselves to the Lord, who has shown us mercy.

Remembering His faithfulness can also help us discern what deserves our attention now. We have examined what has been entrusted to us, named those to love, and begun to identify the wisdom and testimony we can share. From that work, the next question is: given our responsibilities, relationships, gifts, and present capacity, what does faithfulness require of us next?

The answer may involve a new opportunity or a responsibility already before us. We now turn to discerning the next assignment, keeping our eyes on Jesus.