

Your Story in Three Minutes

Standalone Practicum Module · Acts 22:1-21; Acts 26:1-29; Galatians 1:11-24

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim

Discover, by putting St. Paul's three tellings of his own conversion side by side, that a testimony has a stable shape, that the details change with the audience, that Paul is markedly selective, and that it lands on Christ rather than on the speaker. Then have everyone in the room write and say their own.

Catholic Touchstone

The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of evangelization, and a testimony is an account of what God did rather than a report on one's own spiritual progress. This module is a practicum: two thirds of the time is people writing and speaking, not discussing.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

How to run this one

This module is different from the core sessions. The Build section is short and the practicum is long. Plan for roughly thirty-five minutes of study and forty-five minutes of writing, saying, and hearing.

You will need paper, pens, and a timer. Do not skip the timer; the whole exercise turns on three minutes being a hard limit.

It works best after Session 6, and it is the natural companion to the rung six practice where people wrote their "one thing I know" sentence. If your group has done that, this module expands the sentence into a story. If they have not, this module can stand entirely on its own.

Paul tells it three times, and never the same way twice

St. Luke narrates the conversion in Acts 9, and Paul tells it himself twice: to a hostile Jerusalem crowd in Acts 22, and to King Agrippa in Acts 26. St. Paul tells it a fourth time, compressed almost to nothing, in Galatians 1.

The shape is the same every time: what he was before, what happened, and what he was sent to do afterward. Before, encounter, commission.

Everything else moves. The details, the register, the length, and the emphasis all shift with the room, and the shifts are not evasions. They are attention.

Acts 22: common ground first, and the sentence that lost the room

He speaks in Hebrew, and St. Luke notes that the crowd became more quiet when they heard it (22:2). Before any content, he chose the language that told them he was one of them.

Then he establishes common ground at length: a Jew, born in Tarsus, brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, "being zealous for God as you all are this day." He identifies with them before he differs from them.

Then he names his own guilt plainly: he persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women. No softening and no excuse.

And notice how he describes Ananias (22:12): a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews living there. In Acts 9 that detail is absent. Here it is the detail that will land, so it is the one he gives.

The crowd listens all the way to verse 21, "I will send you far away to the Gentiles," and then erupts. He lost the room at the one point he could not leave out.

Acts 26: a completely different register, same story

Before Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus, the opening is courtly: "I think myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today." He appeals to Agrippa's knowledge of Jewish customs and controversies.

He frames the whole thing as a question about hope: he stands on trial "for hope in the promise made by God to our fathers." And then, to that assembly, "Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?"

Festus interrupts and calls him mad. Paul answers without heat: "I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth."

And then the ending, which is one of the great sentences in Scripture. Agrippa says, "In a short time you think to make me a Christian!" And Paul: "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains."

He wants his hearers to have exactly what he has, except for his chains. Read that aloud and let it sit. It is the test of whether a testimony is really about Christ or about the speaker.

What he does not do

He does not make his sins the centre. He names them candidly and moves on, and where the room calls for it he gives real detail: Acts 26:9-11 runs to several clauses. What he never does is linger on them or make them the subject.

He does not describe his feelings. There is no account of what the experience was like inside him.

He does not make himself the hero of a journey. In the encounter itself the verbs belong to someone else: a light shone, a voice spoke, I was told, I was sent. His own response is active, though: Acts 26:19-20 has him not disobedient, and declaring.

And he does not end on himself. Each account carries the sending, and each ends on what God is doing rather than on what happened to Paul.

These four omissions are the whole practicum. Most people's first draft violates all four.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Testimony as an Israelite practice

Psalms 66:16: "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me." Psalm 107:2: "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble." The instruction to say out loud what God has done is old, and in the Psalms it is a public act rather than a private reflection.

The pattern under Paul's telling

Several of these accounts echo the shape of the prophetic call: an encounter and a sending, with an objection or a fall in some of them. Compare Isaiah 6:1-8 and Jeremiah 1:4-10. If your group has done Session 8, they have already found this pattern and can name it themselves.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Augustine, whose *Confessions* is one of the most influential conversion narratives in Christian literature

The *Confessions* is a conversion story, and its most striking feature is grammatical: the whole book is addressed to God rather than to the reader. Augustine is not narrating his journey to an audience; he is telling God what God did, out loud, and letting us listen.

That is the discipline this module is teaching in miniature. When the second person of a testimony is God rather than the hearer, the story stops being about the speaker without anyone having to be told to be humble.

St. Augustine, Confessions. Work-level citation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. Cyprian, on what he thought was impossible

Writing to his friend Donatus shortly after his own baptism, St. Cyprian describes in substance how he had believed that the change being asked of him was simply not achievable for a man of his habits, and how, after the water of new birth, what had seemed impossible began to be possible.

It is an early Christian first-person account of conversion, and it is short. Notice what he emphasizes: not his own effort, and not the drama of his former life, but the fact that something worked which he had been certain would not.

St. Cyprian of Carthage, summarized from To Donatus. A faithful summary, not a quotation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH | St. John Paul II on the first form of witness

St. John Paul II wrote that the witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission, and that the modern world listens to a life before it listens to an argument.

Note the word irreplaceable. Not sufficient, which he says elsewhere, and not optional either. Your testimony is not a substitute for content, and no amount of content substitutes for it.

St. John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio 42 (1990).

CATECHISM CONNECTION

The Church treats personal witness as a duty of the baptized rather than a gift some people happen to have.

- **CCC 905.** Lay people fulfill their prophetic mission by proclaiming Christ in the testimony of life and in the spoken word.
- **CCC 2471.** Christ came into the world to bear witness to the truth, and the Christian is not to be ashamed of testifying to the Lord.

- **CCC 2472.** Bearing witness to the Gospel in words and deeds is a transmission of the faith.
- **CCC 425.** The transmission of the faith consists primarily in proclaiming Jesus Christ, in order to lead others to faith in him.
- Using a three minute time limit is our practical device, not anything the Catechism prescribes.

LEADER NOTES

THREAD WATCH | leader only

This is a standalone module. It carries none of the core study's threads and gives nothing away. It can be run before, during, or after the thirteen sessions, or entirely on its own with a group that has never met the core study.

If you are running it inside the core study, it fits most naturally after Session 6, whose practice was to write a single sentence beginning "One thing I know." This module expands that sentence.

Protect the practicum. The temptation is to let the Build discussion run long because it is more comfortable than making people write. Do not. The forty-five minutes of writing and speaking is the module; the study is the setup.

Watch for. Somebody in the room converted quietly, gradually, or as an infant, and has concluded they have no story. Read the guidance in Practicum Step Two before you begin, and make sure that person hears it.

SESSION GOALS

1. Have the group find the stable shape across Paul's tellings: before, encounter, commission.
2. Have them find, by direct comparison, which details change with the audience and why.
3. Name the four things St. Paul does not do, and get them into everyone's draft.
4. Have every person in the room write a three minute testimony.
5. Have every person say it out loud to at least one other human being, timed.
6. Send everyone home with a version that has been said twice and cut once.

TIMED PLAN

Minutes	Movement
0:00-0:05	Opening prayer and explain the shape of the evening. Say up front that most of tonight is writing and speaking.
0:05-0:11	Win questions.
0:11-0:17	Read Acts 22:1-21 aloud.
0:17-0:27	Build 1 and 2, the shape and the common ground.
0:27-0:39	Live discovery: Acts 22 and Acts 26 side by side.
0:39-0:45	Build 3, what St. Paul does not do. Write the four omissions where everyone can see them.

Minutes	Movement
0:45-1:00	Practicum step one: write. Fifteen minutes of silence.
1:00-1:15	Practicum step two: say it. In pairs, timed, three minutes each, then swap.
1:15-1:20	Practicum step three: cut. Five minutes alone with the draft.
1:20-1:26	Practicum step four: the leader goes last. Say yours to the room, timed, and let them stop you at three minutes.
1:26-1:30	Build 4, the objection, in brief. Take-homes and closing prayer.

If you only have 75 minutes, cut these first

- Read only Acts 22:1-16 aloud and summarize the ending yourself. Saves five minutes.
- Run the discovery with the leader reading the two openings rather than the group comparing whole passages. Saves seven minutes.
- Drop Build 4 entirely and put the objection on the take-home. Saves five minutes.
- **Never cut the practicum.** If you are badly over time, cut everything before it and run the module as forty-five minutes of writing and speaking with a five minute setup. It still works.

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS

IF IT GOES SIDEWAYS | leader only

Somebody will say they have no story because they were baptized as an infant and never left. That is a real and common situation and it is not a deficiency. Their baptism was a real rescue; it was simply not a story they remember. What they are being asked for is the answer to "what difference does this actually make to how you live," which is often harder to say and lands harder when said. Have that sentence ready before anyone raises it.

If someone's draft is mostly about a person who hurt them, redirect gently and privately, not in front of the group. A testimony that requires a villain is not finished, and a testimony that names a living person to a room is a problem.

If someone discloses something serious while writing or speaking, receive it, do not process it in the room, and follow up during the week. This exercise surfaces things.

Do not correct anyone's theology in the practicum unless it is genuinely wrong rather than merely imprecise. Tonight is about getting people to speak at all.

Discussion Guide

Your Story in Three Minutes

Acts 22:1-21; Acts 26:1-29; Galatians 1:11-24

OPENING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you have done something in each of us, and most of us have never once said it out loud in an orderly way. Give us honesty about what you actually did, restraint about what we did, and the courage to say it to someone this week. Amen.

WIN

- ▶ Has anyone ever told you their conversion story? What do you remember about it?
- ▶ What makes you stop listening when somebody talks about their faith?

BUILD

Read Acts 22:1-21 aloud. This is St. Paul speaking to a crowd in Jerusalem that had just tried to kill him, so read it as a man talking a hostile room down rather than as a devotional passage.

1. Acts 22:1-21. Break the speech into three parts. Where does each one start and stop?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

Before: verses 3 to 5. Who he was, how he was raised, what he did to Christians.

Encounter: verses 6 to 16. The road, the light, the voice, the blindness, Ananias, and the washing away of sins.

Temple vision and objection: verses 17 to 20, where he is praying in the temple and raises his own past as an objection. Commission: verse 21, the command to go far away to the Gentiles.

Before, encounter, commission. That is the shape, and it holds in every telling. Write it where the group can see it, because everyone is going to use it in an hour.

2. Look at how the speech opens, in verses 2 and 3. What does he do before he says anything about Jesus?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He speaks in Hebrew, and St. Luke tells us the crowd quieted down when they heard it. Before any content at all, he chose the language that said he was one of them.

Then he spends a full verse on common ground: a Jew, born in Tarsus, brought up in this city, taught by Gamaliel, educated in the strict manner of the law of our fathers, "being zealous for God as you all are this

day."

He identifies with them before he differs from them, and the identification is true rather than tactical. He really was all those things.

Then, immediately: "I persecuted this Way to the death." He names his own guilt in one clause, without softening it and without dwelling on it.

LIVE DISCOVERY | let the group find it

Send them to compare. This is the most useful twelve minutes in the module.

Split the room. Half reads Acts 22:1-21, the other half reads Acts 26:1-23. Give them five minutes.

Then ask three questions in order. What is in both? What is only in one? And why?

What they should find. In both: before, encounter, commission, and an encounter with the living Jesus. Note the difference: Acts 26 explicitly argues the resurrection, while Acts 22 presupposes it in the appearance. Only in Acts 22: the Hebrew language, Gamaliel, the temple vision, and Ananias described as a devout man according to the law who was well spoken of by all the Jews there. Only in Acts 26: the courtly opening to a king, the appeal to Agrippa's knowledge of Jewish customs, the saying about kicking against the goads, and the framing of the whole case as being about hope in the promise made to the fathers.

The why is the lesson. To a Jewish crowd he emphasizes that Ananias was law observant, because that is what makes the story credible to them. To the hearing before Festus and Agrippa he opens with deference and argues from hope and from the prophets, because that is the room he is in. The story never changes. The doors into it do.

Then read Acts 26:28-29 aloud yourself. Agrippa says, "In a short time you think to make me a Christian!" And Paul answers: "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am, except for these chains." Ask the group what that sentence reveals about who the testimony was for.

3. Now the negative list. Across both speeches, name four things St. Paul does not do.

Leader: write these four on a board or a sheet. Everyone will check their own draft against them in forty minutes.

ANSWER | share after the discussion

He does not dwell on his sins. "I persecuted this Way to the death" is one clause, and it is the whole of it. No detail, no inventory, and no lingering.

He does not describe his feelings. There is no account anywhere of what the experience was like inside him. Given that he was knocked to the ground and blinded, that is a remarkable omission.

He does not make himself the hero. In the encounter itself the verbs belong to someone else: a light shone, a voice spoke, I was told, I was sent. He is not passive throughout, and should not be made so: at Acts 26:19-20 he says he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision and that he declared the message. Divine initiative governs the story, and his own response is real.

He does not end on himself. Each account carries the sending, and each ends on what God is doing rather than on Paul. Do not say every telling ends on the commission: Acts 9 runs on past it, and Galatians 1 ends

with the churches glorifying God.

Most first drafts break all four. That is normal and it is what the practicum is for.

4. Someone says: my story is boring. I was baptized as a baby, I never left, nothing dramatic ever happened. I have nothing to tell. Are they right?

ANSWER | share after the discussion

No, and the correction matters enough to say plainly.

A testimony need not be a dramatic adult rescue narrative, and it is not a before and after photograph. Say the first part carefully: their baptism genuinely rescued them from sin and gave them new life; what they lack is a story they remember, not the thing itself. It is an answer to the question of what difference Jesus Christ actually makes to how you live, and that question is harder for the cradle Catholic, not easier.

The person who left and came back has a story with a shape built in. The person who never left has to do the harder work of noticing what has been quietly true, and when they do it well it lands harder, because it cannot be dismissed as a phase or a crisis.

Practical version for the practicum: this person can write "what I was handed, what I came to own, and what I do about it now" -- offered as one possible framework rather than a formula, since not everyone can name a moment when it became theirs. Same three part shape, different content.

SEND

- ▶ Which of St. Paul's four omissions is going to be hardest for you?
- ▶ Who is the specific person your three minutes is for? Write their name at the top of the page.

PRACTICUM

PRACTICUM | write it, say it, cut it

PRACTICUM. This is the module. Roughly forty minutes, and do not let it get compressed.

Step one: write. Fifteen minutes of silence.

Three paragraphs, on paper, in the shape you found in Acts 22. What I was. What happened. What I do now.

Rules for this draft, taken from the four omissions. These are constraints for the exercise rather than laws of Christian testimony: keep your sins brief and never let them become the subject, keep description of your own feelings out of this draft, give God the active verbs, and end on what he is doing now rather than on you.

If you were baptized as an infant and never left, one workable shape is: what I was handed, what I came to own, and what I do about it now. Your baptism was a real rescue; you simply do not remember it.

Write the name of one real person at the top of the page first. You are writing it for them, not for the room.

Step two: say it. Fifteen minutes, in pairs, timed.

Three minutes each, strictly timed, then swap. The listener does not respond, does not ask questions, and does not compliment. When the timer stops, the listener says one thing only: the sentence that landed

hardest.

If a person runs out of material at ninety seconds, that is fine. If they run over three minutes, the timer stops them mid sentence, and that is the most useful thing that will happen to them tonight.

Step three: cut. Five minutes alone.

Go back to your page and remove the self-display. Not everything about yourself: your real response to grace belongs in the story. What goes is anything that is there to make you look good. Then remove the second best sentence in it. Almost every testimony is improved by being shorter and by losing its cleverest line.

Step four: the leader goes last, and goes first among equals. Say yours, timed, to the whole room, and let them stop you at three minutes. Do not exempt yourself.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

This week. A story that has never been said out loud to anyone who was not in this room is still a draft.

- Say it to one person outside this group this week. Not as an announcement; when the conversation makes room for it.
- Say it under three minutes. Time yourself beforehand if you have to.
- Do not add anything to the end. For this week, no invitation, no question, no verse. That is a training constraint and not a rule: Paul himself asks Agrippa a direct question at Acts 26:27. The constraint exists so you learn to let a silence be someone else's.
- Afterward, write down which sentence you wanted to add and did not. That sentence is usually the one that is about you.
- Rewrite it once more in a month. It will have changed, and it should.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you have done something in each of us that is worth saying out loud, and most of us have been quiet about it for years. Give us words that are true, short, and about you. And give us one person this week who will hear them. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

"Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me."

Psalm 66:16

MODULE 1 | PART THREE

Leader Reference Card

Your Story in Three Minutes

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

Passage	Where and why
Acts 22:1-21	Primary text, read aloud. Paul to a hostile Jerusalem crowd.
Acts 26:1-23	Live discovery. Paul before King Agrippa.
Acts 26:28-29	Live discovery, read aloud by the leader. "Except for these chains."
Acts 9:1-22	Leader prep. St. Luke's own narration, for comparison.
Galatians 1:11-24	Leader prep. The same story compressed, told for a different purpose.
Psalms 66:16	Memory verse and Old Testament Roots. I will tell what he has done for me.
Psalms 107:2	Old Testament Roots. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.
Isaiah 6:1-8; Jeremiah 1:4-10	Old Testament Roots. The prophetic call pattern under Paul's telling.