

HOW TO WRITE MY TESTIMONY

Writing Your Testimony is part of your Recovery Process.

We live out Principle 8 and Step 12 as we share our hope in Christ with others.

This is a guide to help you write your Celebrate Recovery Testimony. God's word tells us, "It is proof of your faith. Many people will praise God because you obey the Good News of Christ—the gospel you say you believe—and because you freely share with them and with all others." 2 Corinthians 9:13 NCV

Testimony Guidelines:

- a. Before you start writing, pray and ask God for help and the words to share.
- b. Your testimony needs to be about 12 to 17 minutes long. It needs to be typed out.

About 9-12 double-spaced pages, 12-point font, 3,200 words or less

- c. Please include 1-2 favorite scriptures, *a step or principle & mention Step Study & Open Share*
- d. Be honest. (**No graphic descriptions or triggers.** *Avoid sharing someone else's inventory.*)
- e. Remember that you are not cured.
- f. Don't use religious clichés *and avoid being "preachy" and or teaching a lesson.*
- g. Keep it short and to the point.
- h. HAVE FUN!

There are four major parts to your story. Relax and let's get started!

1st The Old Me (3 minutes – 2 ½ pages)

- a. Start out with, "I'm a believer who's in recovery and struggles with_____."
- b. What was the insanity of my life before recovery?

- c. What are some of my circumstances that others could relate to?
- d. What was my relationship to God like?
- e. What was my attitude to others like?
- f. What was my lowest point?

2nd My Experiences & Changes in Working through Celebrate Recovery (3 minutes – 2 ½ pages)

- a. How I got into recovery?
- b. How has my growing relationship with Jesus Christ influenced my recovery?
- c. How did working the program help me? *(Be specific)*
- d. Did a single step touch my heart in a special way?

3rd The New Me (6 minutes – 4 ½ pages)

- a. What changes has God made in my relationships with others?
- b. What areas of my old life are gone and how have they changed?
- c. How has my walk with God changed?
- d. What are some of the benefits that I have received from working the program?

4th Outreach (3 minutes – 2 ½ pages)

- a. What encouragement can I give to a newcomer? *(Use the word “newcomer”)*
- b. Am I sharing the Good News with the World? Where? With whom? *(How are you “giving back”?)*

Please submit (email) your testimony at least two weeks prior to your scheduled date

for edits. We will be looking for triggers, realizing that CR needs to be a safe place for everyone. Once your testimony is approved, please do not make corrections, additions or deletions.

Thank you for sharing your life – the message of hope and recovery in Christ! God will bless you and all who hear of His good work in you!

Helpful Tips: *Prior to sharing your story, enlarge your Font to 14, 16 or 18 and make sure that every page ends in a sentence to avoid a long pause while trying to turn the page mid-sentence. Number your pages in case of a mishap Rehearse it several times so you will be familiar with it.*

Why Should Testimonies be Written, Reviewed, and Read?

Our greatest resources in Celebrate Recovery are our one true Higher Power Jesus Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. All Celebrate Recovery curriculum and meetings depend upon these vital resources. Beyond these, the next most powerful resources available to us is a personal testimony of recovery. The importance of the testimony is seen in the prominent role it plays in the annual schedule of Large Group meetings. Twenty-two of the fifty-two meetings feature a recovery testimony. Because testimonies are so important, there are guidelines for preparing and presenting a recovery testimony. Many will enter your Large Group meetings with life and death issues. Often they are looking for an excuse to leave and not return. This is not the time to have someone “shoot from the hip.” You need to be sure that those who attend hear a Christ-centered recovery testimony that is based on real experiences and filled with hope.

One recommendation of CR training is that recovery testimonies be written and reviewed before being read in the Large Group time or in other venues. Long (12-17 minute) testimonies to be shared in the Large Group meetings should be submitted to the Ministry Leader for review at least two weeks before presentation. Some of the most frequent questions I am asked at CR events or by those visiting our local ministry include:

- Why is it necessary to have testimonies written and reviewed?
- What are the reasons for reading a testimony from a script?
- Isn't it boring to hear testimonies read?

The last question is the easiest to answer and includes both a principle and experience.

Isn't it Boring to Hear Testimonies Read? No.

The principle is: The excitement and appeal of a CR testimony comes from clearly conveying how God has powerfully rescued and transformed one of His children. God's power is to be showcased, not the presentation skills of the individual. When you attend the Summit at Saddleback or a One-Day seminar, you will notice that John and Cheryl

Baker read their testimonies. It is safe to say that no two people have shared their recovery testimonies more than John and Cheryl. They do so because there are some distinct advantages to reading a carefully written testimony. I have heard hundreds of testimonies read at the annual Summit, or at One-Day conferences, in visiting CR groups in my region, and in my own local ministry. I have never been bored by listening to someone read their testimony...encouraged, inspired, deeply moved, convicted...but never bored!

Why is it Necessary to have Testimonies Written and Reviewed?

- **Helps the Presenter Prepare with Confidence**

You will find that many of your CR folks doubt both the value of their story to others and their ability to communicate their story. Many may need help with grammar, wording and overall composition. Having them write their testimony provides an opportunity for Ministry Leaders to mentor, guide, and encourage those who are reluctant to share. As you work with the individual through the review process you have the opportunity to build their confidence.

- **Avoids Triggers**

One of the most important promises you make to those who attend your CR is that it is a "safe place." Part of keeping CR a "safe place" is insuring that what is shared in a testimony does not trigger unhealthy responses. Writing out a testimony that is reviewed insures there will be no graphic descriptions and/or inappropriate language in what is shared. What can be appropriately in an Open Share Group that is gender and issue specific might not be appropriate to voice in the Large Group Meeting.

- **Prevents Unnecessary Offense**

Many who enter your program have had a negative experience with church earlier in life. Resentment towards particular denominations or groups that are voiced could deeply offend other participants if these are mentioned by name. By reviewing a testimony you can help them share their experience without attaching negative labels

to secular recovery groups, specific churches or denominations.

- **Eliminates “Church” Language**

The audience in your Large Group meeting will include individuals who have little or no experience with the church. They may not know what “redemption” means but they can understand that Jesus has the power to set them free from their addictions, their harmful habits and their guilt and shame.

- **Insures that the Testimony Focuses on Recovery Principles and Experiences**

It is not enough to describe how one was saved from Hell to gain Heaven. Recovery testimonies need to zero in on hope that God can deliver us from specific hurts, habits and hang-ups during our lives on the earth. Testimonies need to *offer evidence* that the principles and steps taught in CR really work.

- **Helps in Adapting each Testimony to Focus upon a Particular Principle or Step**

As your ministry matures and your participants mature in their recovery they will be able to see more clearly how each step or principle worked in their own experience. Working from their original written testimony with a reviewer makes it easy to zero in on particular recovery principles or steps. This will move your testimonies towards the ideal of presenting a testimony reinforcing the previous week’s lesson.

- **Provides a Working Text for Preparing Short Testimonies for Other Venues**

One of the most powerful tools you can employ in expanding the impact of CR within your own church membership is to have CR testimonies on Sunday mornings or in other weekend services. Usually these need to be 5-6 minutes in length. Working from a script of the long testimony makes this much easier. Preparing to share in a worship service where children and youth are present also mean adapting the testimony to be appropriate for such an audience.

What are the Reasons for Reading a Testimony from a Script?

- **Places the Focus on what God has done**

Some may be tempted to try to be clever or entertaining. The objective of the testimony is to clearly communicate how God sets us free from our hurts, habits and hang-ups. Simply reading the testimony insures the good communication of the person’s story. “Playing to the audience” could divert them to the point that they fail to finish their account of recovery.

- **Assures that what has been Approved is what is Shared**

All the advantages of leadership reviews of testimonies may not share it they believe they have to have a talent for public speaking. Some of the most powerful testimonies come from the most fearful individuals. Without a script to read from they would never be able to share these vital stories of God's transforming power.

- **Frees the Emotions of the Presenter**

Time and again individuals are understandably overcome by emotion in telling their stories. With a script they can let the tears flow for a few moments and then get back on track.

- **Controls the Length of the Presentation**

Even the most skilled and experienced communicator can lose track of time. Many who share a testimony may be far from experienced or skilled. Reading from a script helps them finish within the allotted time.

Many who hear the recommendation that testimonies be written, reviewed, and read may feel that this quenches the Spirit during the presentation. If that is a deep, theological conviction held in concert with your congregation, tradition or denomination, then you must work within the framework of your local church. This writer believes that the guidance of the Holy Spirit can be just as powerful during the process of preparation as He can during the presentation itself.

As a senior pastor it is important to me that these guidelines for testimonies are followed. Because the leaders of my own CR ministry have consistently enforced these guidelines, I have never been caught by surprise or embarrassed by a testimony shared in our Large Group meeting or during a church worship service. Take advantage of what the CR leaders at Saddleback have learned "the hard way" by experience. Test it in your own church and I am confident you will be blessed as one wonderful story of recovery after another is shared to the glory of God.

Written by: *John Pollard, TX – South Central Regional Director for Celebrate Recovery*