



Ideas for Local Preachers' and Worship Leaders' Meetings

SHARING OUR STORY: USING TESTIMONY IN WORSHIP

Story lies at the heart of our faith – the Bible itself contains hundreds of stories which shed light on what it means to be human beings who are loved by God. The central truths of the gospel are expressed in the stories of people who encountered Jesus. We all have stories to tell, and listening to them enriches us and enhances our worship.

Testimony has been at the heart of Methodist worship from the beginning. Rediscovering it in our worship today is just a matter of giving opportunities to people to tell their story, and providing space to listen.

This session¹ is designed to last about an hour and introduces some ideas for including testimony in worship. It can be used in a Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Meeting as CLPD² or as part of a study day. The aim is that everyone should leave with at least one idea they want to try.

Outline

1. **Setting the Scene:** explore what testimony is and why we do it – max. 10 minutes.
2. **Exploring Possibilities:** choose a selection from the testimony ideas below and try them out in the group – the main item.
3. **Feeding back:** allow space during the session for conversation and interaction, in pairs or groups.
4. **Closing:** finish with Bible reading and quiet prayer and reflection.

1. SETTING THE SCENE

Use one or both of these questions as appropriate:

Ask the group: ***What is testimony?***

Record responses on the chart or whiteboard.

Some possibilities might be

1. Bearing witness to...
2. Your experience
3. Can be viewed as daunting
4. It's simply sharing our story.
5. Public statement of faith
6. Relating to what you have seen and done
7. Telling your story



10 mins



Flipchart or
whiteboard
& pens

¹ By Paul Wood and Ian Worsfold, based on a session at *Worship Academy* in the Southend and Leigh Circuit entitled *So, what's your story?*

² Continuing Local Preacher Development.

8. How God has been with us in difficult times
9. Witnessing to God in our live
10. How I found Jesus
11. Testing out our faith
12. Speaking of God's providence

Ask the group: **Why use testimony?**

Discuss in pairs or small groups, collect selection of thoughts. Ideas might include:

1. Good to celebrate what God has done and is doing.
2. Reminder that God is still active in our lives and in the church
3. It's personal
4. It gives encouragement to others
5. It's rooted in reality
6. It offers reassurance
7. It shows God is still active
8. It builds up others' faith
9. It's one of building blocks of faith - Experience is part of "Wesleyan Quadrilateral"
10. The more willing we are to share our stories in church, the more willing we will be to tell story outside
11. Stories are more engaging than being preached at
12. 1 Peter 3: 15: ... **Always** be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

2. EXPLORING POSSIBILITIES

Choose a selection of the ideas below to use in the session. All of them can be adapted for use in worship – the possibilities are endless. Here is an opportunity to try out a few ideas in a safe space.

Match stick testimony

Ask for volunteers to take part.

In the time it takes for a match to burn tell us:

- Why do you come to Church?
- What do you believe about God?

Repeat as many times as appropriate for the group.



5 mins



Box of matches

This Time Tomorrow

Invite a couple of people to answer these questions:

- What will you be doing this time tomorrow?
- What challenges will you face?
- How can we pray for you?

The first two questions can be adapted, e.g.:

- What is the thing you're most looking forward to this week?

For more information about *This Time Tomorrow*, see

<https://www.licc.org.uk/resources/this-time-tomorrow/>.

Bible story that speaks of my understanding of God

Most people have a Bible story that has spoken to them for a long time or is speaking to them now.

Encourage them to share this story with the group and say a little about what it means to them and how it affects their understanding of God.

Note: Ask someone in advance to be prepared to do this.

Sofa Interview

Ask a member of the group (who has previously agreed to do this) to be interviewed.

The conversation should be relaxed and informal. This sets the volunteer (and those listening) at ease. You can ask them about their passions, the things they do to serve the church, the things they do outside the church.

One key benefit of this approach is that it supports the person giving their testimony with prompts, prevents them rambling and ensures that the person is listened to. Hence it is a good method for encouraging those who are less confident in standing up and speaking in public.

Music tells a story

Invite a volunteer (who has been prompted in advance) to share a piece of (non-religious) music that speaks of their relationship with God. If at all possible, play the music or an excerpt from it.

Note: Listening to music reaches deep within us and touches our emotions. People can share what its saying to them. Perhaps that is why worship is infused with music. Avoiding religious music stops the conversation falling into religious cliché.



5 mins



5 mins



Prepared
volunteer



10 mins



Prepared
volunteer



5 mins



Prepared
volunteer

Biblical input – The Effect of testimony.

There are a number of Biblical passages that show the effect of testimony on people's lives.

John 4: 27-40 is an excellent example:

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' ²⁸Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' ³⁰They left the city and were on their way to him...

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.'⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days.

The power of testimony is that it has the ability to change lives.

Ask the group for other examples of testimony in scripture and list on flip chart.

Discuss: How might you use a passage like this to encourage people to share their own stories of life and faith?

Sharing Good News stories

Some times of worship lend themselves to spontaneous interaction with those gathered.

Ask the question **What's God doing now?**

Encourage people to share what occurs to them. Don't worry about stating the obvious, or sounding clever and eloquent. Remember the psalms are full of obvious things about God expressed in simple heart-felt language.

Allow for pauses, and for the more timid to gain confidence. This simple technique works well in multi-generational worship and often the most profound things are said by children.

This is probably the easiest way to enable a congregation to share.

Discuss: How and when might you use this in worship?

Sharing a Hymn that speaks to my Christian journey with God

Similar to **Music tells a story** above, but ask someone to share a hymn of song that speaks of their journey with God. It's best if this is not over prepared – were not looking for a thesis – but asking someone to come prepared to contribute can be helpful.



10 mins



Flipchart or whiteboard & pens



5 mins



5 mins

My call to...

This is more like what people traditionally have understood a testimony to be. However, instead of giving an open invitation to talk about their whole Christian life, which often results in the story of their conversion years ago, here, the focus is on a specific call from God and how the person responded to it.

For example:

- My call to be a Worship Leader
- How I came to be a Local Preacher
- How my faith led me into the emergency services etc. etc.
- How God's call led to me being a minister

The key is to keep it short, prepare well but keep it real and relevant. An interview format can help in providing prompts for the speaker, keeping the conversation on track, and maintaining spontaneity and interest.



5 mins



Prepared
volunteer

3. FEEDING BACK

What have we learned?

Ask people to reflect in pairs or small groups on two questions from this list (or others appropriate to your situation):

- Which exercise did you find most interesting during this session, and how could you use it when you lead worship?
- What challenges you most about testimony and using it in worship?
- How would testimony fit into the worship in the churches where we belong?
- How could testimony be used to enhance the presentation of the gospel message together with our preaching?
- What other ways are there of sharing testimony?

After five minutes of group conversation, invite an idea from each pair or group – keeping it brief!

Record ideas on the flipchart or whiteboard, inviting people to take pictures at the end as a reminder of the discussion.

Wise Advice

Testimony is a wonderful and powerful way to share faith and encourage the church. It should be used wisely though – probably not every week. Keep it concise and don't always focus on 'when I became a Christian', even though that still has power.



10 mins



Flipchart or
whiteboard
& pens

Consider carefully the questions you use to prompt testimony so that it fits with the message and the style of the worship.

4. CLOSING

Read this passage and allow space for quiet reflection:

Luke 24: 25-34:

²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' ³³That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' ³⁵Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

This is Jesus' story – this is our Gospel, Good News and it has the power to make our hearts 'burn within us' to put the fire back in our belly, and to continue to shape our stories.

Conclusion

There is power in your story because it's **your** story and nobody knows it better than you!

Our challenge is to keep asking:

- Where is God in our story today?
- What is the Church's story today?
- How might we tell those stories in and through our worship?

And for all of us: 'So, what's your story?'



5 mins