

OpenTheo

Evaluating Testimony as a Tool for Evangelism

January 13, 2024



Knight & Rose Show - Wintery Knight and Desert Rose

Wintery Knight and Desert Rose evaluate the use of personal testimony as a tool for evangelism. What does the testimony approach offer to non-Christians? How is testimony used in the Bible? How should Christians engage in conversations with non-Christians? How does the widespread use of testimony change the way that Christianity is perceived by non-Christians in the culture?

Please subscribe, like, comment, and share.

Show notes: <https://winteryknight.com/2024/01/13/knight-and-rose-show-43-testimony-as-a-tool-for-evangelism>

Subscribe to the audio podcast here: <https://knightandrose.podbean.com/>

Audio RSS feed: <https://feed.podbean.com/knightandrose/feed.xml>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@knightandroseshow>

Rumble: <https://rumble.com/c/knightandroseshow>

Odysee: <https://odysee.com/@KnightAndRoseShow>

Music attribution: Strength Of The Titans by Kevin MacLeod Link:
<https://incompetech.filmmusic.io/song/5744-strength-of-the-titans> License:
<https://filmmusic.io/standard-license>

Transcript

Welcome to the Knight and Rose Show, where we discuss practical ways of living out an authentic Christian worldview. I'm Wintery Knight. And I'm Desert Rose.

Welcome, Rose. So today we're going to be discussing different approaches to evangelism and discipleship. So Christianity is an inherently evangelistic faith.

And by that we mean that people who are already Christians want to share what their message is about the Christian truth claims with non-Christians. Rose, I'm asking you this. Do you think that this is like convention or is this a specification, you know, that comes straight out of the Bible? Yeah, well, this is commanded in what is known as the Great Commission that we find in Matthew 28.

It is basically Jesus' final marching orders to his followers. So Jesus has already, when he shares this Great Commission, he's already risen from the dead, and he's about to ascend to heaven. And this is what he leaves his followers with.

Now, why don't you go ahead and just read the verses. Yeah, so Jesus says, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Okay, so this word evangelism, most people may not know that, but like in the technical field we call people who try to improve a feature or adopt a new component, technical evangelists. So it's actually a word that has usage outside of the context of religion.

But the word disciple, that one may take a little bit of explaining. So what do you mean by that? Yeah, well, the disciple means student. So becoming a disciple doesn't mean praying the sinner's prayer, as we're often given the impression maybe in churches and things like that.

A disciple is someone who learns the teachings of their teacher. It's someone who imitates their behavior. It's someone who adopts their priorities.

So it's like it's a student and imitator. And so as Matthew 28 says, we are to teach people to obey everything he's commanded. It doesn't say we're to teach people to say a prayer and get a box checked, but rather to obey everything he has commanded.

Yeah, it kind of reminds me of you and your self defense training. Like you go in there, they make you memorize words, they make you spar, they make you do patterns. And you're not just learning something that is done on the first day, it's a one and done.

This is more of an ongoing process of getting better and being able to kind of if your instructor is not there to fend off the attacker, then you're there and you have to act in place of your instructor because you've been a student of your instructor. Exactly. Right.

Yeah, that's that's an excellent analogy. OK, so being a disciple in the Christian context, basically, if I'm looking at somebody and I'm discipling them, then I'm building up their ability to do what exactly? Well, there are a few different components to this to kind of borrow from R.C. Sproul's teaching. He talks about Notitia, Asensus and Vidutia.

And so I don't want those words to throw anyone off. We'll talk about what they mean. But the first one, Notitia, is basically content.

It refers to to what disciples of Christ must believe. It's kind of the what of the Christian faith. What does it teach? What do we need to know? OK, so what are some examples of the Notitia or content? What kind of information are we trying to share with somebody when we're discipling them? Yeah, I can give a few examples.

So, for example, that God created the world, that God's character is good, that he is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent. So meaning all-knowing, all-powerful, present everywhere. It includes that we fall short of God's standard of perfection, that we are sinners in need of a savior.

It includes the knowledge, the content that Jesus is that savior for us. He's the Messiah, the expected one. He is the one who is God incarnate, who came to earth as a man, lived a sinless life, paid the penalty due to the father for our sin and rose from the dead to demonstrate that he had the authority and that his claims were trustworthy.

He was who he said he was. Suppose I get that right. Suppose I give someone, you know, the information.

Are we done? I mean, is this person now like a full follower of Jesus or what what else? Well, no. So then, as I mentioned, the census, you know, that's a scent to these beliefs. You don't just know these beliefs, but you actually believe them.

And so a sense would be our conviction that the content of our faith is true. OK, so you can know about the Christian faith. You can know all about it.

You can know better, better than we do and yet believe it's not true. But genuine faith, a scent says that the content, the Natishia taught by the Holy Scripture is true. OK, so it's possible for somebody to just know the content, but they don't think it's true.

Have you ever talked to somebody who was in that condition? Yeah, actually, the first person who comes to mind is I had a college friend who knew the Bible a whole lot better than I did. I was a new believer when we were friends and he knew the Bible inside and out. He had something like perfect recall or just an incredible ability to remember what he had read.

And so he knew what the Bible taught, but he just didn't believe it was true. Interesting. So what are some ways of getting someone to think that some of this data or information is true? Well, only the Holy Spirit can change someone's heart, but we can remove barriers to help someone become open to that change by sharing reasons and evidence for the truth.

So my college friend who I mentioned, he had never heard evidence for the truth of the

teachings of the Bible. So he knew the content, but he thought that it was a collection of fairy tales. And as he was presented with evidence, he actually became open to personal assent.

And then eventually, later in his life, he did assent to those teachings. He now believes that they are true. OK, so here we've got the person who has all the information.

They think it's true because they have investigated it or they have reasons or evidence or something that makes them think it's true. Now, are we done or is there another part to being a disciple even beyond this? Right. Yeah, there's still another component.

So as James two nineteen says, even the demons know these things and know that they're true, believe that they're true and they tremble before the Lord. But they do not choose to act in a way as to submit their lives to God to the truth. So fiduciary or trust refers to action that we personally take that demonstrates that we we are actually placing our trust in what we say we believe and what we believe intellectually through our actions, through our decisions, through our behavior.

So faith is effectual if knowing about and assenting to the claims of Jesus, a person personally trust in him alone for salvation. Yeah, this is actually the the proper definition of the biblical word that is translated faith. The Greek word is pistos.

And when we talk about faith kind of in our culture, we tend to believe. Yeah. And we're kind of conditioned to think about to associate the word faith with the word blind or leap of.

Right. It's a blind faith. It's a leap of faith.

But that is not what pistos means at all. Whatever you see the word in the New Testament translated faith. It has it's they're not talking about blind faith or leap of faith.

It's talking about placing trust in the Lord with our actions, making decisions that demonstrate we believe what we claim to believe. And so actually a better, a better modern translation for that word that's translated faith would be trust. Yeah.

Let me speak about this a little bit. So sometimes when people are young, they're not quite sure how to handle education and money. So what I do when I'm mentoring someone in these areas, as I say to them, hey, take a look at this data about what salary you're likely to get if you study this, you know, major rather than this major.

And are you aware that you're not just and you're not just going to pick what you like, what tastes good to you, that the goal of this is to be able to earn a salary so that you can marry if you want to get married, have children if you want to have children. And so it's not just up to you. It's it.

There are rules here about how you do this. And then you could say the same thing about student loans and how people kind of get on those or get on credit cards and end up paying off their loans when they're 30, 40 and 50. And you can show how that happens.

You can you can show evidence and you can you can show people how much they have to save in order to retire by a certain date. And they can they can kind of deny all of this and you can kind of debate with them to get them to a cent. But the last step is they accept it.

And you can't you just cannot be hovering over someone's shoulder all the time, making sure that they're doing the right things with respect to education, career and finance. So they kind of have to know this stuff, agree with this stuff, and then they have to take action that's consistent with this. So their priorities might change, you know, they might say, well, before I was spending half my income on comic books or half my income on makeup, you know, and all of a sudden they just say, oh, I can't do that.

I've got to put away 10 percent. I've got to have two months in my bank account for possible, you know, unexpected expenses. I got to have two months of salary, sorry, two months of salary in my bank account.

Just just general practices that are consistent with being prudent with money and and career and education. So that's what we mean when we say three part faith and so on. So have you got to have you got an example like that where you were discipling somebody and you got that change? Yeah, several times.

One that comes to mind is a young woman will call her Kelly. She called herself a Christian. But for example, she was sexually promiscuous, even as she was telling everyone she was a Christian.

This was quite a while ago. And so it was kind of a popular thing to call yourself a Christian. And people would call themselves Christians as a way to kind of say, I'm a good person.

Maybe people still I think people probably still do that in some places. But anyway, so as Kelly and I met and studied the scriptures, she not only began to assent to the beliefs that we were studying, but she also demonstrated her trust by discontinuing having sex with different guys outside of marriage and then being abstinent until she then met a Christian man who she wanted to marry. Then she got married.

She had children with him. She she's been faithful to him ever since. She's raised children with him.

And so it was a complete 180 from just, you know, I'm a Christian who does whatever I want versus I'm actually going to make the decisions that demonstrate I'm trusting

Christ with my life. And the key point here is that we're kind of by discipling her in that way, you're kind of taking away the idea that she can give herself the label of Christian without having gone through the three steps. Right.

So if you're doing like driving instruction and you've never had the classroom education, the written test, the practicing and then the actual driving test and then you go out and drive, right. And don't get into any accidents, obviously. Then what are we really talking about here? You can call yourself a driver, but if you aren't doing it and you haven't gone through the process, you don't have a license and you're not good at it, then you're not really what you claim to be.

Yeah, that actually that actually reminds me of when I first got my learner's permit and, you know, I had just passed the test. I had learned all the information. I got it all right.

I was perfectly willing to say, I know how to drive. I'm a good driver. Yeah.

Look, I got all the answers right. And trust me, I really believe it. And then my instructor in downtown Houston where I had just passed my test and got my learner's permit.

I'm in downtown Houston. I lived like 45 minutes away or more from the DMV and he hands me the keys and says, great, drive us home. It was late at night.

It was raining. Houston drivers are crazy. It's typical to go 85, 90 miles per hour down the highways.

And suddenly I didn't, I didn't believe that I knew how to drive, but I put my trust in what I had been taught and demonstrated that actually I can do this. And I'm willing to try. Yeah.

This is a very common thing I see with Christian parents. I'm not trying to be mean here, but sometimes they expect the behaviors out of their kids and they act all shocked, you know, when the kids hit college and they go crazy and completely turn their back. It's like, well, you've had 18 years of this, you know, or well, 18, you don't start when the kid's like a newborn.

It's like, okay, here's your, you know, your bottle and your and the here's your. Okay. So not 18 years, but like, you know, say you got, you know, 10 years of.

Of being able to have the opportunity to say, okay, let's settle this question. Do you think really God created the universe and what are your grounds for thinking? So, and what's going to happen when you hit college and you're in a completely different environment where all the smartest people think you're crazy, you know, what's going to happen? So I think you can't have these outcomes. So you're talking about being able to drive a car in Houston at night in the rain 45 minutes.

That's what college is like. Okay. So if you throw a brand new driver in, you're not going to expect that they're going to reach the goal.

The only way that they're going to reach that goal is if they've been disciplined in a way that can accept a challenge like this, but they know what they're doing. They have practiced. There's no rule against, you know, practicing, like explaining a book or having a little debate.

You know, there's nothing that says that your Christian development can't include a little test, you know? So, you work your way up to that. It just the same as you do with anything, you know, self-defense, marksmanship, driving a car, anything you do for work, you know, you work your way up to this. And I think a lot of people don't see faith that way.

They think saying yes, you know, saying yes to your parents. Oh, yeah, I believe that they think that means something. And it's like, no, that doesn't mean anything.

What we're looking for here is is a demonstration. Yeah, a demonstration. Particularly, as we're going to see later, the Christian life should involve if you're not dealing with some kind of challenge and disapproval, social disapproval, you really got to question whether you're strong enough to do this, you know? Which, of course, it's, you know, God gives us that strength, but we're responsible for what we put into our mind and for that equipping and for that, you know, that training.

And then then we then we demonstrate that we trust the Holy Spirit in that in those difficult situations. Right. Let me ask you this.

So in the Bible, how does Jesus and his apostles take on this job of making disciples? What's their approach? Well, the primary approach seems to be speaking truth and teaching truth and providing evidence to demonstrate that what they're saying is true and that they have the authority to speak that truth or to do carry out the claims they're making. So let me give you an example to make it an example. Yes, one of my favorite passages.

Is Mark chapter two. And again, I could give we could give dozens of passages like these, but Mark two versus one through twelve is the healing of the paralytic. Okay, so some men wanted Jesus to heal their paralyzed friend, but the crowds were large.

And so they went up on the roof and dug through the roof and lowered their paralyzed friend down through the roof into the presence of Jesus. And Jesus saw the paralyzed man and he forgave his sins. Then the religious leaders started accusing him in their minds of blasphemy because only God can forgive sins.

And so this was essentially Jesus claiming to be God, to having the claiming to have the authority to forgive sins. And so Jesus healed the man's paralysis in order to show that

he had the authority to forgive his sins, he says. But so that you may know that I have the authority to forgive sins, I say to you, paralytic, get up and walk.

And he did. And people glorified God. And so Jesus is combining content, the claim about his authority to forgive sins with a sense, you know, giving people a reason to believe his claim.

Yeah. And he does this a lot. Like I got an example of this as well.

So in Matthew 12, 22 to 42, Jesus is confronted with a man who is blind and mute and the blindness and muteness is attributed to demon possession. So Jesus casts out the demon and then the man's blindness and muteness is healed. And the people around him who haven't, you know, who are still thinking, what should we make of this guy? They go, could this be the Messiah? Because the Messiah is supposed to have this power.

Right. But Jesus's opponents are there. And they go, well, he's only casting out demons because he's in the hierarchy of demons, you know.

And so he's, you know, they work for him or whatever. I don't know. And Jesus goes, well, that's stupid.

Demons don't cast out other demons. That would be like one football player tackling his own. He doesn't say this, but one football player tackling his own running back, you know, behind the line of scrimmage.

You know, you wouldn't do that. And he's saying, actually, the way that I'm doing this miracle is I'm doing this miracle by the Spirit of God. And the Pharisees go, yeah, Spirit of God, prove it.

Give us a sign. Right. And Jesus goes, OK, I'll give you a sign.

And remember, he's giving the sign to non-believers. Right. So he's saying you're not so terrible in your situation that I can't give you evidence and cause you to consider it.

You know, otherwise, he'd just be wasting his time and he'd say, well, I'm not going to give you any sign because you're no good. He actually says a wicked generation seeks a sign and I'm going to give you a sign. I'm going to give you the sign of Jonah.

And he describes being in the belly of the whale for three days and then coming out, he's talking about his own resurrection. And of course, that's a historical event that when it happens, the people who were witnesses to this will go, oh, so he must have been telling the truth about how he's doing this by the Spirit of God. Right, exactly.

And especially once he had risen from the dead. And then, yeah, people would recognize that as, oh, wow. Yeah.

The third day, what we see throughout the Bible, Old Testament, New Testament. We just gave a couple of examples from the New Testament, but people who have read the Old Testament will recognize as well that miracles are most frequently used as evidence throughout the Bible. In the New Testament, miracles continue as evidence for Jesus' truth claims.

And then we also see fulfilled prophecy and eyewitness testimony. Today, we may not see miracles used as often as in the New Testament times, but we still have evidence. So the evidence that we have access to today is more likely to be scientific evidence for intelligent design, for example, historical evidence for Christianity, but it's still evidence.

Yeah. So like we can't we can't create a universe to show someone. But what we can do is we can say, would you accept that the creation of the entire space time matter and energy universe out of nothing? Would you accept that that is not possible by natural means because there's no natural law, if there's no material universe and the person would go, yeah, sure.

I mean, everything coming out of nothing. Sure. That would be supernatural because it's the beginning of the natural world.

And we are great. So that's a miracle. And now I'm going to give you reasons to believe that that's how it happened.

And, you know, you give you give reasons to for the standard cosmology like cosmic microwave background radiation and helium hydrogen abundances. Right. So we can make a case for God's miracle, but we can't even if we can't perform a miracle, we can make a case for a past miracle.

Right. Using science, even or history. So that's evidence.

Right. Yep. Exactly.

So almost as good. OK, next question. So is this use of evidence to try to get a scent from from someone as part of their as part of this discipling process? Is that the standard approach that Christians in our times in the West use? I would say, no, not at all.

I mean, I think that most Christians who have spent much time in church will probably agree that the mainstream teaching about sharing our faith with people is the use of personal testimony. So sharing about our personal experiences as a means of sharing the truth. And yet a changed life, a personal testimony of how, you know, I used to do such and such or I used to I used to be depressed.

I used to be a drug addict. I used to be this or that. And now I'm not depressed anymore.

Or now I'm not doing drugs or whatever. These things don't establish a truth claim about

the Bible. So others, other people who are not Christians have stopped drinking before without becoming Christians.

People have stopped doing drugs by other means, by self discipline, by willpower, out of fear through Islam. I've had people, Muslims tell me about how Islam is responsible for their good behavior. It's easy, like in an age of relativism, where everybody is talking about my truth, it's easy for somebody to say, oh, well, I'm glad that work for you.

But I don't have that need. Right. OK, because my life doesn't have that problem that you have.

Right. Exactly. Yes, exactly.

And one problem. So one problem with this view is that if the society as a whole thinks that Christianity is just a way of solving your your personal life problems, if it's just another self-help technique, then they'll see it as subjective and not as something for them to investigate, not for something that they need to submit to, especially if they don't feel the need for that kind of help. Right.

And that's why it's important for Christians to understand when they're doing their discipling that we're not offering an opinion to people that is about our lives. We're offering an accurate view of the way the world is and we're willing to shoulder the burden of correcting their false beliefs like the universe is eternal. OK, I'm willing to take that on.

All right, exactly. Yeah, and I want to be clear that, you know, we're not saying that it's wrong to share stories of God's power in our lives. I don't think that's wrong at all.

I share stories of what God has done and is doing in my life all the time. I think our stories are especially encouraging to other believers who know that Christianity is objectively true. But, you know, maybe my story can encourage someone during a hard time.

It can challenge them in a new way, in a way that the spirit is working in their lives. It can remind people of God's power and of his goodness. I know other believers' stories of God's goodness and his power in their lives have have been a tremendous encouragement to me at times.

And I when I share in my updates, update letters that I send out to people, I get feedback all the time saying from Christians saying thank you so much for sharing that. That really challenged me or that really encouraged me. But what we are saying is that sharing a personal story that is devoid of evidence doesn't establish the truth of Christianity.

So it's not the most persuasive or the best evidence that we have. OK, so let's deal with an objection to this evidential view of making disciples. What about in the New

Testament where Paul shares his personal testimony with people who aren't Christians? Yeah, well, I would probably ask people if they had a certain passage in mind, but just taking what I know about Paul's sharing of his own story, he's Paul saw the risen Christ.

This is evidence that is that that any lawyer would use in a court of law to establish the truth of a matter. And so if you've seen the risen Christ, please tell people about it. Most people have not, but that would be a great bit of evidence.

Paul also didn't share his story as life enhancement. He didn't share it as as a method of self-help. He shared how his life actually got much harder when he became a Christian.

So this is very different than what we typically see in church testimonies today. We are not saying to avoid eyewitness testimony. Again, if your conversion involves eyewitness testimony that can be used in a court of law to establish the truth of a matter, that is evidence.

And please, please, please share that as often as you are able. And we're not saying to avoid sharing how you may have had a successful, happy, fulfilling life before Christ. And then it became difficult after conversion, but that you want people to know that whatever hardship they go through as a Christian, it is worth it.

It is absolutely worth it because this type of testimony, which we see throughout the New Testament, you know, successful, happy life to to a difficult life as a Christian. This shows that Jesus is the prize worth attaining at all costs. Yeah.

And if and if things are hard for you, you're not you're going in the right direction. Right. Right.

That's a big shock. Right. It is exactly.

Yeah. And so it gets people to think it still doesn't establish the truth of Christianity to say, hey, my life was easy or good or celebrated and now it's hard and whatever, but it's worth it. Yeah, it's still your that's still kind of your opinion, but at least it's it's biblical and it doesn't it doesn't give the wrong impression of who Jesus is or what he offers.

Yeah. Tell us briefly, like how Paul had a great life that turned difficult when he became when he became a follower of Jesus. Yeah.

Well, in Philippians three, for example, he talks about how his life was was great and impressive and celebrated before Christ. He says in verse versus four through six, he says, if someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews in regard to the law, a Pharisee as for zeal, persecuting the church as for righteousness based on the law, faultless faultless faultless. That's I mean, this guy had it all.

He was a very high status, very impressive education in the right crowds, with the right mentors, with the right education. And then we we read about in Acts nine and then he Paul shares this again in Acts twenty six when he's sharing his story with King Agrippa and with Festus. He says that, you know, as a Pharisee of highest regard before Christ, he then saw the risen Christ and was convinced by evidence that Jesus is Lord.

And then we see in in Second Corinthians 11 that his life with Christ has been much, much harder. He's been beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned. He's suffering greatly.

He says he says in Second Corinthians 11, five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. So I mean, that can kill a guy. That can kill you.

Yeah. Yeah. Three times I was beaten with rods once I was pelted with stones.

Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move.

I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea and in danger from false believers. He was in constant danger and living a very, very difficult life as a direct result of his acceptance of Christ as Lord. And then in Acts 26, he is on trial for having done nothing wrong and he would eventually be beheaded, be executed for his faith for having done nothing wrong except believe in Christ as Lord rather than the Roman gods or the Caesar of the day.

So if you're going to use a testimony, it should look something like Paul's. And actually, this reminds me of your story. Your story is a lot like Paul's.

So why don't you just tell us briefly, you know, a bit about what things were like before and after becoming a Christian for you. Sure. Sure.

Yeah. So before becoming a Christian, I think anyone at all would say that my my life was very successful and very moral and worthy of celebration. I was at a top university, my first choice university that I wanted to go to.

I was on scholarship. I was on full scholarship. I was on the dean's list.

I was in the newspaper constantly for my sports accomplishments. I was celebrated by by people all over campus. You know, the wealthiest, smartest, you know, most impressive and future successes in in the United States.

I didn't drink alcohol because I had I had tried alcohol actually when I was under age and I got really sick. It turns out I have an allergy to rye or barley, barley, wheat, rye and barley. But anyway, I wasn't sexually promiscuous.

And I was in my last semester or I was about to start my last semester of college. And so,

you know, I was at no risk of losing my scholarship. I was about to launch out into the world with this successful career.

And I had a supernatural experience, a bit like Paul's experienced encounter with the risen Lord on the way to Damascus. And this experience led me to begin reading the scriptures and investigating the claims, even though the supernatural experience had convinced me that God is real and that I need him. I didn't know who was the real God, you know, or if, you know, maybe I was having some sort of mental breakdown or whatever.

Paul did the same thing, right? In Galatians, he goes back and meets with the early church people and he goes, am I crazy? Or are you guys talking the same thing as me? Oh, you are talking the same thing as me. OK, we we all agree that we saw the same thing. We're preaching the same thing.

OK, good. Right. Yes, exactly.

Exactly. Yeah. And so, you know, people started to notice my change in behavior right away.

You know, again, I didn't go from like a, you know, a drunk, sexually promiscuous person to like some, you know, good, morally amazing person or wasn't that kind of change. But they noticed things like on the way to sports competitions. I was praying in the in the van, the team van.

And how did they take that? How did those college kids take that? Well, I got made fun of. My friends did not approve. They talked.

They were like, you're going to become one of those judgy, awful people. I can't believe that you like you could be so stupid with the education you have to you believe this nonsense. I actually I had always gotten A's on all my papers.

I'm a pretty good writer. I got I took a course in the Divinity School and I got a D on my paper. D as in disaster.

And my professor told me straight up that the reason he was giving me a D was because no thinking person in that day and age could possibly believe the nonsense conclusions that I had come to. So it wasn't my my my inability to prove my claims. It wasn't the you know, the it wasn't that I like plagiarized it or I had a lack of evidence or anything like that.

It was my conclusion that he had a problem with. And so, you know, getting a D on a paper is a is a big deal in university. So my friends, you know, my friends were disapproving.

Some of them stopped speaking to me entirely. One friend yelled and screamed at me, said I was joining a cult and I was abandoning everything that was good and right. And I went into full time ministry for well, really for most of my adult life.

But that that first year after college, when I was expected to enter the workforce and just start making a lot of money right away and and be in an impressive position. Your priorities changed. Yeah, my priorities change.

And so I went into this like one year ministry discipleship internship program. And, you know, instead of making a lot of money, it was actually support raising based until and on top of that, I was working with troubled teenagers and actually living with them. They were crazy.

These are kids, most of them, I mean, all of them really were so difficult that their own parents couldn't take care of them anymore. So they decided to send send their kids to me at a 21 year old who had no idea how to deal with teenagers. It was an incredibly difficult year.

And so that's, you know, that's kind of my initial story. Yeah. So this isn't the story about a changed life where bad behavior suddenly turned into good behaviors and unhappiness changed into happiness.

This is more like what Paul is doing. He's like, I was awesome and I'm so awesome, but it's a lot harder to be awesome. Right.

And I suppose I wouldn't say I'm awesome. I would say I've become I've become more aware of what what the standard for awesomeness is and that I don't make it. But yeah, and I don't meet it.

But but yes, from from the world's perspective, they would say, yeah, you are awesome. And now you're kind of you're kind of less awesome. Yeah, you have a new definition.

So so according to that one, you're doing great. OK, so so just one quick thing. So I want to say to people, if you have a supernatural experience and you're going in a different direction like Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism, I noticed that you jumped right into investigation.

I'm Paul double checked his details with the other followers of Jesus right away. So I would say go quickly and do an investigation. If you had an experience where you're going for Mormonism, just check whether Mormonism is teaching on the origin of the universe is correct.

They believe in an eternal universe. I'm giving that as an example. So just because you have an experience, it doesn't mean that you hit on the right thing.

Double check it. Investigate it. You know, absolutely.

Yeah, definitely. OK, another question. I like this one.

How has the popularity of the current view of testimonies as changed life from bad to good affected the culture and how people perceive Christianity? Yeah, well, and I would include in that question the view of testimonies as like sharing Christianity as life enhancement. So both life enhancement and like better behaviors. There are there are several implications for this unbiblical type of way of presenting Christianity.

So one that you mentioned earlier is the prosperity gospel. This is a huge competitor with the true gospel. The prosperity gospel is rampant throughout the entire world today.

And what we are seeing is a generation that expects to have all of their needs met that as soon as they want their needs met, they want ease and comfort and goodness. And all my dreams come true right now. And then when they realize there's evil in the world or something bad happens, they reject God on the basis of there's evil.

How could there possibly be a good God if bad things happen? It can't be true. So this is a big problem. Another would be religious pluralism.

OK, so this is another big competitor with the true gospel today. I have met people of all religions who have a subjective personal story about their own religion and how they think their religion is true because of their own personal, some sort of personal experience. And so what I've seen among people in the West who have exposure to people of all different religions is they start thinking, well, maybe they're all true.

If a person's subjective personal experience is the way that we know that something's true, right? Maybe they're all true. Or maybe it's true for them, but not for me. And something different is true for me because I had an experience that tells me something's different for me.

Like flavors of ice cream. If you decide which flavor of ice cream you like based on taste and everybody has a different taste, then all flavors are valid. But if you're choosing medicine, then taste doesn't matter.

And it's a real question of which one works, which one is true. Exactly, exactly. So what we also see as a consequence of this type of presentation of Christianity is the perception that Christianity is actually non-intellectual or even anti-intellectual.

And so, you know, Christians need to be denied entrance to top universities because who wants to train up and educate people who are anti-intellectual, who just believe that whatever their feelings of their experience tell them is true, that must be true for them. We also see a culture that says, don't judge. This is like the highest value.

You know, don't ever make anyone feel bad about anything. Don't ever say anything that might hurt their feelings or or, you know, imply that you might not approve of everything they do. And, you know, a lot of this comes from from this whole view of God's love as a high priority, yet without actually understanding what love means by the Bible.

Our culture has taken the word love and filled it with a whole different meaning than the meaning that we see throughout the Bible. And so, you know, biblical love includes discipline and includes hearing what you don't want to hear right now for your long term benefit and gain. And so when this this idea of don't judge is foremost in our culture, then, you know, biblical Christians need to be silenced.

They need to be persecuted in the courts. They need to be eradicated from the public square because these people make us feel bad. And then that's just the greatest evil.

Yeah, we also, you know, we we give the impression that when we share a personal testimony as the the means of knowing the truth, we give the impression that that Christianity is about myself. It's about me. It's about my preferences, my comfort, making my dreams come true.

And so again, then when things get hard, your dreams don't come true. There's this rejection of Christ as if you, you know, you what you believed was not trustworthy or reliable. And that's true.

What you believed was not trustworthy or reliable, but that's because you believe the wrong thing. You did not believe what Christ taught or what the Bible teaches. And so when people are disappointed or hurt by a false message that they associate with Christianity, they tend to go after Christianity in a big way with with tremendous anger and hatred and ferocity.

They don't. What I have seen is not people being disappointed by the message that they heard and then just saying, OK, well, I guess it's not true. Well, I'm just going to go on living my life as an atheist, but it's great that other people are Christians.

No, that's not what I see. What I see is I was hurt. I was disappointed because what I was told was not true.

I put my faith in it and it turned out to be false. And so I'm going to go after these people who hurt me. And I'm going to silence these people who who disappointed me, who, you know, who caused all this pain for me.

So we really do ourselves, the church, Christ, our Lord, a disservice when we share a false gospel and then people are disappointed. Yeah, definitely. I would say that it kind of creates this perception in people that Christianity is about good behaviors.

You know, right. Right. And not true.

So again, I've met people who were raised in Christian homes, who raised born in conservative states, raised in Christian homes, attended Christian schools and they became atheists the minute they set foot on a university campus. And then I meet them a few years later in the workplace and I say to them, well, let's talk about your atheism. Why, you know, let's let's see whether that's true or false.

And they go true or false. Who cares? I'm a good person. And so their assumption is, is that why worry about me? I've got Christian morals.

So what are you talking about truth for? I've got the outcome you're looking for. So why engage me at all? And they're not they're not understanding that the point of Christianity is to have an accurate view of the world that puts you in an effective relationship with your creator and designer. It's not about what you think, you know, you want to do on your own.

It's about getting you connected accurately with the person you're responsible to. Yeah. And I think this, you know, I'm a good person, so I don't need church is is really more rampant than we may think.

And I think I say that because I think of all the people who don't practice Christianity, who don't submit to to Christ for years. And then they have children, their children may be turned five or six or whatever. And they say, oh, we need to get to church because our children need to learn morals.

Yeah, that tells me right there is something is off in your beliefs. There's no this, this testimony sharing tends to make people think what is the marker of successful Christianity is change behavior and there's no time being given to true beliefs. Right.

And and letting people adjust to the true beliefs. And I think that's that's stultifying on kids. It can cause rebellion because instead of telling the kids, OK, let's just talk about the way things are and then you do what you want.

OK, that that's freeing. And that's how you and I experienced Christianity. There was nobody breathing down our necks telling us do this behavior.

It was more like we were like, oh, is this true? Let's investigate whether this is true. Wow. The universe has a beginning.

Wow. You know, it's like, maybe I should do something different than what I've been doing. You know, I'll decide that, though.

You know, whereas in a Christian home with these guys that I run into in the workplace, what the insistence was on the behavior, you will do this, you will do that. And that that can be very heavy when the person doesn't see why they have to do it because because reality is a certain way. That's why it's prudent to do it and it's right to do it and it's

rational to do it.

You know, right. So we got it backwards. You know, right.

Exactly. Exactly. All right.

The testimony approach to evangelism kind of creates an expectation that if you become a Christian, then your biggest problems are suddenly going to get better. So how does that affect a person who takes that approach to Christianity in the long term? I think that's a really important question. So I used to I've probably heard close to 500 testimonies.

I've worked in a lot of different ministries where sharing our testimonies was part and parcel of just how we did things. And so let me give a few examples. So and these are all changed names, just so people know.

But, OK, I have a friend, we'll call her Cindy. She I asked her why she became a Christian. She told me, well, when I was in middle school, I didn't I hadn't studied for a math test and I kind of in an act of desperation.

I said, oh, my God, please help me if you're there. Please let me pass my math test, even though I didn't study. And then when she got her report card, she had an A in math.

And so she's like, hallelujah, God must be real. My I passed my math test. Apparently I got an A on my math test.

Right. So so she she accepted Christianity, which was the predominant religion in her culture. But then when later, when things didn't work out the way she wanted to, when she had adult challenges that were similar to kind of a middle school math test.

And then but things didn't work out. God didn't save her from, you know, the presentation she didn't prepare for. And that sort of thing.

She said she decided, oh, well, this must not be real. And she has since become a pro of abortion advocate, someone who who despises Christianity, who makes fun of Christians. I have another friend who was struggling again in middle school with a relationship.

This girl was picking on her constantly and she was crying. And, you know, a youth group, they encouraged her to pray about it and she prayed. And then this this girl, this enemy of her, started becoming nice to her and became her best friend.

And she's like, oh, all my problems are solved. I'm friends with the most popular girl in school who used to hate me. And but then when when relationships got hard later in life and things weren't working out the way she had hoped and all her dreams were not coming true, she became a radical feminist again, rejecting Christianity and and spending her time trying to draw people away from Christ.

I have another friend, I think I've mentioned on an earlier podcast who was about to graduate from a very prestigious university. But she had to as part of her graduation requirements, she had to dive off of the high diving board into the water and she was scared. And so she got up on the high diving board and she was like, oh, my goodness, I cannot do this.

God help me. I cannot do this. But I really want to graduate.

And as she was saying, God help me, somebody pushed her off the diving board and and she passed that counted. She passed her requirements. So she's like, oh, God made it work out for me.

I have my degree from this prestigious university. Well, later she experienced some very, very difficult things, some sexual abuse and things like that and decided, well, Jesus didn't make this work out for me. And this is an even bigger deal than graduating from university.

And today this person practices witchcraft. So, again, I mean, I could I have, you know, a couple of dozen stories like this, but these were people who were convinced to follow Jesus because he made their desires work out in their timing for their benefit. And so when things stopped working out the way they wanted in their timing for their benefit, they walked away from Christ and again became not only just silent atheists, but a real snare to Christians.

Yeah, we definitely don't want to encourage people to have a view of what faith is that comes out of this sharing your your testimony that causes them trouble in the long run. It's probably better that tells them the truth and go, hey, let's look at the Bible, see how this faith is being shared and then what comes next. You're faithful to what you've learned and people kind of make trouble for you and say that's normal.

That's normal because I'm telling you, I keep running into these people who are coming out of Christian backgrounds and were born in red states and I'm running into them in the office. And the minute that they hit university, they're terrified of seeming dumb in front of their atheist professors and their atheist friends, or they just want to have fun and have a good time. And if you if you haven't given them a worldview that that explains that they should expect that and that they have should should have different priorities than having fun, they're just going to drop this like a hot potato.

Exactly. And what we see from Jesus throughout the New Testament and throughout the gospels rather is him telling people this is going to be hard. This is going to require tremendous sacrifice.

Count the cost. And if you're willing to pay the cost, then follow me. Otherwise, you're free to walk away.

Very different from the try to win them over by telling them how great their life is going to be and how God's going to solve all their problems. Yeah, it's crazy. Another question for you.

So why do you think that this approach of sharing personal testimonies is so popular today? Well, for one thing, it's a whole lot easier in a few different ways. Not only do you not have to learn any evidence, you can just share your own personal experiences. That's a lot easier than learning evidence for the objective truth of something.

But it's also easier in the sense that it's a lot less confrontational. It's, you know, who is someone how is someone going to challenge you when you say this is what I experience. This is my personal experience.

This is, you know, any time I say tradition, that's what Al Gore said. Al Gore, the Democrat politician, he was in my faith tradition. Right.

Right. Exactly. Yeah.

When I when I used to share my personal testimony as kind of the means of my primary means of evangelism, because that's what I was taught in the church, even though I had become a Christian through evidence. I was taught, well, you don't want to be confrontational. You don't want to offend someone or upset them.

So just share about your personal experience. And when I did that, what I kept finding was that people were saying to me, I'm so glad you found something that works for you. Like people were praising me for finding something that works for me.

They were praising me for for my love, for others, for my kindness, for my goodness, for my, you know, decision to do what is what works for me. You know, no one no one feels bad. No one feels judged when you're just sharing your own personal experience and not making truth claims.

Yeah, I noticed the same thing. It's kind of convenient for people to advocate for the testimony approach because it kind of gets them praise, but without any rejection or judgment. I can tell you in college, I was in different Christian groups and kind of, you know, hoping to impress Christian ladies.

And any time this is this is very significant to me at the time. But any time I took a hard stand on something like apologetics or a moral issue, you know, this would get me an instant rejection, you know, to claim to know something rather than to say, this is my feeling or this is my experience, immediately got you tagged as too hard line, you know, to come into a relationship with. So it was really, you know, people talk about, well, how are you suffering like Paul is? I think that was a big problem.

That was a big challenge for me was saying, well, I'm either going to talk about these

truth claims and say, well, so and so was wrong. Or this is why I think this is correct factually. Or I'm going to be able to go on this marriage track, you know, it's difficult to say, but I bet you a lot of guys my age are having to make that decision.

Am I going to talk about truth and morality and defend the unborn and defend natural marriage, male female marriage? Or am I going to get in with people who don't drudge Christians, like Christians who just say, well, I don't want to hear, you know, that about the truth claims of the Bible. Let's all just get along. Right.

And lest anyone think that perhaps, you know, your experience may be unique somehow, I have experienced the same thing, not in the sense of like approaching people for, you know, dates or marriage. But as far as friendships, I have lost so many friends from making truth claims, not even directly to them, but oftentimes like on social media or something like that. And then I'll get a response, don't judge.

And then I'll say, well, this is why it's objectively true. And then next thing I know, I'm blocked. So, yeah, this happens all the time.

But, you know, something else that I think I mentioned to you earlier that I know Muslims who have shared their personal testimony with me about their life change or how things worked out for them or how they're so good because of Islam. If you find if we're saying that if we're going to believe that that subjective personal testimonies are persuasive, that they they establish what is true, at least for you or for me, then we'd have to accept the testimony of a Muslim who says that they they used to drink alcohol, sleep around, have an abortion. But then they became a Muslim and they clean, clean their life up.

I mean, they had they better clean their life up in some ways if they're going to become a Muslim, especially in the in the genuine Muslim world, because the penalties are severe, the penalties are severe, to put it mildly. Yes. But I have heard these types of testimonies from Muslims.

And so if you're a Christian who thinks that sharing your testimony establishes a truth claim, then you're going to have to I would I would think you would have to be consistent and then accept the Muslims. Truth claim to know that Islam is true because it made their life the way they wanted it to be. I think that this actually does play a role in the problem we have with religious pluralism today.

People now in in the West have friends from all different worldviews who all have different personal experiences that explain why their worldview is is the right one or as good as is trustworthy is worth following. So who are we to say their worldview is wrong? Right. OK, let me ask you one last question.

What do you want people to take away from this discussion of discipleship and evangelism methodology? Well, one thing I'd like people to take away is that it is a

command from our Lord to go out and make disciples. It's not optional. And so if that's not happening, I would encourage people to pray about that, consider that, learn apologetics, learn the reasons for the hope that you have and learn how to share the gospel.

Because sharing your personal story is not sharing the gospel. These are those are two different things. You could include the gospel in a presentation of your what happened to you or you can include the gospel when you're sharing apologetics.

But sharing the gospel is a different thing, which we talked about at the beginning under Notitia, like, you know, what is what what's you know, what is the content we need to assent to? Yeah. And so I would say learn apologetics. Don't rely on personal stories as a primary means of evangelism just because it's easier and and nonconfrontational.

I'd encourage people that when they do share their personal stories, because again, we're not saying never share your personal testimony. We're just saying that that is that not be the primary means of evangelism. That is not the same thing as as establishing a truth claim.

So when you do share personal stories, consider and evaluate prayerfully check your desires. If you're seeking ease and that's why you're sharing your personal story instead of approaching it some other way, then that's a problem. If you're seeking to avoid confrontation, to avoid the judgment of others or the accusation that you're judgmental, then there may be a spiritual problem there.

It's actually I think people when they're having discussions about religion, the one of the ways they get into trouble is they're not talking about something testable, you know, and they're not showing their own work. Man, you can go into any office and have a discussion about when the gospels were written, you know, the dating of it. And you can talk about how scholars determine what counts as a minimal fact.

Right. Right. What are their criteria? We've done shows on this, but nobody's going to get mad at this.

Right. Right. But what it does is it shows the person you're talking to how you've approached this.

And then when they have a question, they don't go to somebody who tells them what they want to hear. They go, oh, I know you've got this solved and you've looked into this. So tell me how I should do this because you're saying, oh, I've done this well.

I've put in the time I watch a lot of debates. I'm very comfortable and easy to talk to. You know, I'm not woke.

I'm not going to like fire you if you ask me, you know, what do you really think? So I think

Christians have a real advantage in this area, because if they just understand that they could put a little work in on an issue like this and then just say, hey, here's why I think this this thing that we can test. The fine tuning in the universe. This is why I think this is true.

And here's what I read to come to this conclusion. And here are the debates I watched. That is not going to get you what you're fearing.

You know, the kickback that you're fearing. I think that is such an important point. Absolutely.

I'm so glad you mentioned that. I actually I share evidence with non-Christians all the time. We have amazing conversations.

People don't. You know, when I ask people, so what do you do? You know, I ask the scientists down the street in my neighborhood. You know, what do you do with this evidence? How do you explain it? He he is enthralled and he responds with well, you know, initially, well, I guess we'll never know.

And then, you know, a year later, wow, I've been thinking about all that evidence you've been sharing. And I think I'm going to have to admit that Christianity is actually the best explanation for the evidence. This is when we're focused on the evidence.

This doesn't turn into a you, you know, stupid head, you big it, you you're saying I'm bad. Are you saying I'm going to hell? You know, I'm not saying you're going to hell. I'm saying that you thinking that the universe has always existed is not what scientists believe.

Right. That's what I'm saying. Do you want to take a look at the data? You want to.

I'm ready. Yeah, even with even with people who are pro LGBTQ, I've had really good conversations and I've had, you know, and they've come up with anger and challenged me. I heard you're a Christian.

Does that mean you believe that that gays and lesbians can't love who they want to love? And I changed the topic to the evidence as opposed to, you know, some sort of opinion I hold or or, you know, personal. Of them. Yeah.

Judgment of them. And next thing I know, we're having a great conversation. And and the the the response is, oh, OK, well, OK, hey, you want to go for a walk tomorrow? I mean, literally that that happens.

So, you know, I think I'd like to close with something I say pretty frequently, which is what you win them with is what you win them to. So if you if you win people with promises of life enhancement, you've won them to the prosperity heresy. You have not

won them to Christ, who admonished his followers to count the cost and said, take up your cross and follow me.

Yeah, that's excellent. I think that's a great place for us to stop for today. So listeners, if you enjoyed this episode, please consider helping us out by sharing this podcast with your friends, writing us a five star review on Apple or Spotify, subscribing and commenting on YouTube and hitting the like button.

Wherever you listen to this podcast, we appreciate you taking the time to listen and we'll see you again in the next one.