

Title: BLESS – Share Your Story

We are coming to the end of the series on what it means to BLESS people with our spiritual conversations.

B **Be with people**
L **Learn their story**
E **Embody God's Truth**
S **Share your story**
S **Share God's story**

Hopefully you have noticed that there are THREE big things we do BEFORE we even begin telling people *anything*.

- We practice being present with them! (Really being present is such a big deal these days in our tech-distracted world!)
- We become students of their lives and their stories! (We want to understand them before trying to be understood.)
- We demonstrate God's good life with our walk before we get to the talk. (Our prayer is that others will catch the sweet fragrance of heaven coming off of us.)

If we are faithful in the first three things, then we can trust that God – at the right time – will bless us with the opportunity to share our story and to give an account for the hope that we have in Christ Jesus.

**When the opportunity to share your story comes...
... will you be ready?**

The question is: When that opportunity comes, will you be ready?

As I was trying to find a bit of scripture that captures this morning's theme – Share your story – I realized that best examples of personal testimonies come in the form of songs. Mary's Magnificat is a great example, and of course the psalms. I guess that shouldn't surprise us. When we know something to be true in our bones, the best way to get it out is to set it to music.

Psalms 71 begins with a statement of faith and a cry for help. I have put my trust in you God. You are my rock of refuge. You are my fortress. So rescue me now. Hear my cry. Save me. Deliver me from the clutches of evil people. In verse 14 the psalmist expresses what—for them—is the bottom line when it comes to their trust in God:

**But as for me, I will always have hope;
I will praise you more and more.**

... And then goes on to describe how they will tell their story to anyone who cares to listen:

Text:

Psalm 71:15-20 NRSV

- 15 My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,
of your deeds of salvation all day long,
though their number is past my knowledge.**
- 16 I will come praising the mighty deeds of the Lord God,
I will praise your righteousness, yours alone.**
- 17 O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.**
- 18 So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might
to all the generations to come.
Your power ¹⁹ and your righteousness, O God,
reach the high heavens.**
- You who have done great things,
O God, who is like you?**
- 20 You who have made me see many troubles and calamities
will revive me again;
from the depths of the earth
you will bring me up again.**

When the preacher says, “Can I get a witness?” Those who have their hope in God can start singing Psalm 71 at the top of their lungs.

Here are some things I love about this text.

First, the psalmist says that God’s deeds of salvation are greater than they know: “Their number is past my knowledge.” For all the difficulties I know God has carried me through, there are so many more of which I was completely oblivious!

Second, the psalmist is really clear that it is God alone who deserves the credit and the glory. “I will praise your righteousness, yours alone.” My testimony is never about how good a Christian I am, but how great a God that God is!

The psalmist then asks that God would keep protecting, if for no other reason than to give more time to testify to more people! “...[E]ven to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come.” I was listening to a podcast with two of my favorite teachers, who are both in their late seventies:

Richard Rohr: The problem is there are too many old people who aren’t elders.

James Finley: God, Help me to be the kind of old person young people want old people to be!

Psalm 71 wonderfully describes the kind of old people that young people want us to be!

Finally, in verse 20 there is a recognition that God does not keep bad things from happening to us, but carries us through them. As the NIV puts it,

**Though you have made me see troubles,
Many and bitter,
You will sustain my life again;
From the depths of the earth
You will again bring me up.**

There is a great and hard truth here. The truth is that **God protects us from nothing, but sustains us in everything.**

I wonder what parts of your own story are coming to mind right now? What are the righteous acts of God that your mouth longs to tell?

As a bit of warm-up, I want to give you a homework assignment: I want you to write your story, in the form of a blog post. A typical blog post is about 800 words. This is about two typed pages, double-spaced.

Clearly this is not going to be your whole life's story. There is A LOT that gets left out. It may contain a little bit of biography, but that's not the point of this story.

Sharing your story doesn't (necessarily) mean giving your "personal testimony." It may not be about your *conversion*, but about your *transformation*. Tell a story about an encounter with God that changed you forever. There's good chance that this encounter was at a critical crisis point in your life. And the truth is: We can probably tell transformation stories from every era of our lives. There is nothing "one and done" about our life with God.

Write your story and make sure you use "normal" words that even people who did not grow up in church would understand. Ask yourself: How would I explain, "I got saved at church camp when I was 12" to someone who has no idea what a church camp is, much less what it means to "get saved."

When it's done, share it with someone else. Bring it to church next Sunday. Find one or two other people and read your stories aloud to each other. You can probably get through your story in less time than it takes for your audience to finish their donuts!

To make this more interesting: If you are listening to another person's story and the storyteller uses a term like *sinner*, *repentance*, *sanctified*, or *filled with the Holy Spirit*, then they owe you a donut. If they use a Greek word, they owe you a dozen donuts.

Having done this little bit of homework, you will now be ready for God to set a divine appointment for you!

Is this the story God will want you to share with another person? The answer is: Maybe. Or maybe it will be another one that God brings to your mind and heart when you are having a spiritual conversation. But now you will know that whatever story God has for you to share, it doesn't need to be long. However, it does need to focus on *God*, on what God *has done*, and on what God has done *for you*.

If this isn't the story, then what part of your story needs to be told? The answer is: It depends. Remember how Col 4:5-6 urged us to "buy up every opportunity"? If you have really been with another person, and heard their story, and been in conversations salted with grace—that is, full of curiosity, care, and compassion—then you may know a good deal about where your friend is in his or her spiritual journey. You will also begin to see how their story and your story touch one another. That is where Holy Spirit inspiration comes. The Spirit helps us see the connections between our stories and God's story. We will look at that a bit more next week.

Let us pray.