

# The First Eight Words: Elevator Speeches



**J**UST THE AMBASSADOR AND I, AND NEITHER OF us were happy. Of course, in my defense, I didn't know right away he was an ambassador.

When he sat down next to me on the train it wasn't his first choice—or mine. Eight-hour train rides are seldom fun, but they're even less enjoyable if you don't have an empty seat next to you. As courtesy dictated, we grunted our greetings to each other, made some perfunctory smalltalk, and then retired to our inner shells, just hoping to be left alone.

An hour into the ride, I pulled out a Bible. I heard a huge sigh. Not a mild one, now, but a huge one...the kind that makes people six seats away take notice. So I looked his way. "You're not going to tell me," he bellowed, "you believe that stuff!"

That was it. Stuffy train. Crowded seats. And a sigh? The debate began.

"What stuff?" I countered. (Pretty witty, huh?)

For the better part of the next two hours we waged verbal warfare, discovering as we did so we were both enjoying the banter more than we cared to admit. Gradually our stories merged into the debate. His was infinitely more interesting than mine. Thirty-plus years in the State department, two terms as ambassador to big countries, and now settling into teaching as part of his retirement plan. Once I heard the name I recognized it, of

course, but by then we were far enough into the verbal thrust-and-parry for me not to be awed. Hour three turned into something different. Slowing down over our meals, we started asking questions instead of issuing statements. I asked him how he came to do what he did. Strangely enough, he asked me how it was I came to be a "believer"...his term for Christians.

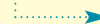
I listened to his story and asked questions. I was genuinely interested in his answers.

He listened to my story and asked questions. And more questions. And still more questions. By now I thought for sure this was going to turn into one of those tales where you sit down next to somebody and you lead them to the Lord. I was literally writing the text in my head as I anticipated the outcome.

It didn't happen that way.

We talked without stopping 'til the train stopped moving, and then we exchanged business cards and promised to follow up with each other. As he left the train he turned to me and said, "By the way, the best part of your argument isn't what you think Jesus can do for me...it's what He's done for you."

Why do you think he said that?



## Scripture Passage

John 9:1-41

## Study

Try this exercise. On a separate sheet, write about the time you finally realized your need for Jesus Christ. (Try to use no more than 300 words.)

Next, write out how you would define these terms: (Try to use no more than ten words for each definition.)

- Sin
  
- Eternal Judgment
  
- Repentance
  
- Grace
  
- Redemption

The exercise above is useful in helping us understand our own journey to Christ, as well as bringing us face to face with Christian terms we must understand. If we aren't able to define them for ourselves, it will be impossible to explain them to others.

When thinking about ways to introduce coworkers to Christ, our first words should be roughly equivalent to this: "I once was blind, but now I see."

Like the ambassador in our opening snapshot, people are much more interested in stories than theories, in testimony over tracts. All the practiced routines in the world won't help us if we can't talk about our faith as a personal experience instead of a sales pitch. That's why it's so important for us to understand what Christ has done (and continues to do) for us. We can't teach what we don't know.

But having a story to tell isn't enough. Too often the story we tell shifts attention away from the work of Christ. Here are some typical testimony styles. Describe why you think they might focus attention on us instead of on a need for Christ:

- The “I was a drug addict, now I’m a goodie-two-shoes” tale
  
- The “I needed (money, a job, a miracle, a healing) and God gave it to me, so I owe Him” tale
  
- The “Look what I’m doing for God” tale
  
- The “I cleaned up my act for Jesus” tale
  
- The “I’ve always been a Christian” tale
  
- The “God always blesses Christians” tale
  
- The “Life is G-O-O-O-O-D” tale

Any testimony we share with non-Christians about the work of Christ in our lives needs to be about that—the work of Christ. To help you understand how to tell others about the work of Christ in your life, we’ve developed a set of questions aimed at identifying the important parts of your testimony. Before we start that exercise, though, let’s review the basic elements that are true for every human being:

*THE “GIVENS”—TRUTHS THAT ARE PART OF EVERY LIFE:*

- God created the World, including human beings. (Genesis 1:1-31)
- Adam and Eve enjoyed fellowship with God before they sinned. (Genesis 3:8-9)
- The sin of Adam separates all human beings from God (Genesis 3:23-24); and, the sin of each human being also separates them from God until they accept Jesus Christ (Romans 3:10-12; Romans 3:23).
- The Holy Spirit makes us aware of this separation, and convicts us of our sin. (John 16:8-11)

- It is not possible for us to make sufficient amends for our past sins to merit being restored to the presence of God, nor is it possible for us to sufficiently restrain from sinning to earn a “from this point forward” relationship with God. Holy living, no matter how intently practiced, still leaves us lacking an ability to restore ourselves to God’s presence. In short, we cannot save ourselves. (Romans 3:21-26)
- Hence, we need another to atone for our sins: Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection was the sacrifice necessary to erase the consequences of our sins and restore us to a place where we can experience fellowship with God. We do not become sinless; rather, we assume the sinless nature of Christ. When God looks at us He no longer sees our still-faltering sinful selves, but rather He sees Christ in us. In that moment of transformation the Holy Spirit also takes charge of our lives, enabling us to change, increasing our understanding, and making us more like Christ. (Romans 3:21-26)

*THE ALTERNATIVES:*

*Positive:* A person understands their sinfulness, desires to repent of this rebellion against God, and accepts Jesus Christ as Savior.

OR

*Negative:* A person fails to recognize their need for Christ or refuses to acknowledge Him as Savior, and therefore remains condemned by their sin. So long as they are alive there remains a hope they will still accept Christ. However, once they die all hope is extinguished.

*Remember the world, and consequently most of your coworkers, continue to believe (a) heaven doesn’t exist; or (b) it exists, and there are other ways to reach it; or (c) it exists, but everybody will be there. There is no Scriptural support for any of these beliefs, but that doesn’t prevent them from believing them anyway.*

While we’ve identified the basic facts in the process of salvation, we still haven’t uncovered the most effective way to communicate them to our coworkers. In fact, what we’ve stressed in this lesson is the idea we should talk about what Christ does for us rather than what he can do for others. It is usually only after our coworkers recognize the work of Christ in our lives (out testimony or witness) that they are willing to consider what He might do for them. So, let’s build the components of our witness by answering a few questions.

In the space provided below, write out the time when you first recognized you were a sinner, or when you first realized you wanted to know what happens after death.

Who or what led you to this realization? (For example, were you attending a Billy Graham crusade? Did you ask a friend about their faith? Was your life so messed up you felt devoid of hope? Etc.)

What did you do about it?

Now refer back to the first part of this lesson where you wrote about finally recognizing your need for Jesus Christ. What actions did you take, and who helped you understand what to do?

Once you accepted Christ as Savior, what was your understanding of what happened to your sin? What was your understanding of what happened to your relationship with God?

Did you suddenly stop sinning? Why is this an important point when sharing our testimony with others?

What changes has this relationship with Christ made in your life?

When you've answered these questions, you have the outline for the elevator speech that introduces others to Christ. It does so by introducing them to the work He's done in you, and it invites them to observe your life for evidences of His influence on you. In most workplace conversations, this is the starting point. It's also often the ending point! This is important because we too often believe we're responsible for the results of sharing our

testimony, and this can cause us to press when we shouldn't. Christ calls us to profess Him to others, but the results are God's responsibility.

Thus, very often the obligation we have to share Christ at work is fulfilled when we tell our own story of salvation...except for one small but very important phrase.

Whenever we tell our story, we also have a duty to make it clear that "God is not willing any should perish" in order to avoid a misunderstanding that God loves us more than others. We can do this simply enough by adding this statement to our own story: "If Jesus did this for me, I promise you He's willing, even eager, to do it for anyone else who asks Him."

If the Holy Spirit is moving in that person's life at that moment, then they may follow up with more questions, in which case you get to move to the "second eight words." (See lesson 15).

This week, make note of the things God is doing in your life. Practice describing them in three minutes or less. Then take a look at your testimony; your story of how you came to know the Lord. Can you tell that story in less than three minutes? Practice it until you can.

## *Common Sense and Eternal Principles*

- The most important place to begin in introducing our coworkers to our faith is our own testimony about how we came to know Christ.
- One of the best ways to narrow the story down to an easily told presentation is to remind ourselves of the details and to link those details to the actual process of salvation.
- We must be careful our testimony doesn't leave people with misguided impressions about salvation.
- Our testimony must be about the work of Christ in our life and not about us.
- God is responsible for the results of our evangelistic endeavors, not us. We do not need to manufacture results or manipulate people.
- Like salespeople who forget to "close the deal," we must always finish the story of what Christ did for us by making it clear He's willing and able to do it for any who seek Him.