

Obtaining a Boast-Worthy Testimony

Gary Wilkerson
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We live in a time when biblical predictions have become visible realities. Paul wrote that in the last days perilous times would come upon the earth (2 Timothy 3:1). Right now things are taking place we couldn't have imagined a few years ago. Who could fathom a fifteen-year epidemic of school shootings?

Jesus predicted that men would become lovers of themselves, lovers of money, hateful, proud and arrogant. Today our nation's leaders can't agree on the most basic common principles. If someone has the nerve to mention sin, he's called a bigot and made an outcast. As God's Word is moved to the sidelines of the culture, sin becomes more and more prevalent.

Pastors feel the spiritual bombardment. Week after week, I learn that another marriage may be falling apart. Kids cut their own skin out of self-hatred. Drugs are more widespread than ever. And there are fewer voices of help as each month 1,500 pastors leave the ministry.

As Christ's body, we can't be asleep to these things. The Old Testament speaks of the sons of Issachar, a group that had a knowledge of the times and skill in dealing with the world. Can the same be said of Christ's body today? If we discern the times, we know this isn't a moment for half measures. The only way for us to "deal with the world" is not to let church be business-as-usual. Jesus said of certain demonic spirits, "This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21, NKJV). In these times, our prayers have to be fervent — because without spiritual change, things look too bleak.

In the midst of darkness, Jesus calls us to be light. And here is our message for such a time: "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4, KJV). God has done awesome works in the lives of his people. And each one of us is called to proclaim his glory through a boast-worthy testimony.

What does a boast-worthy testimony look like? I can fall prey to an unboast-worthy testimony. I'm a confessional pastor; I have no trouble being open about my failures and shortcomings. But if I'm not careful, I can get stuck in a confessional mode. It isn't enough to tell others we're struggling along the journey. *The times call for us to move from a bemoaning lifestyle to a boast-worthy lifestyle.*

Here is the kind of boasting I'm referring to: "As the Scriptures say, 'If you want to boast, boast only about the Lord'" (2 Corinthians 10:17, NLT). To do the kind of boasting Paul describes, we have to have a boast worthy of God's glory.

Biblical figures couldn't fathom a life of faith being business-as-usual.

David never said, "My dad asked me to be a shepherd, so I was a good one. I fought off lions and never lost a sheep." That was a good testimony — but it wasn't boast-worthy of God. David's boast was, "As a young shepherd, I killed a giant who threatened God's people. No one else would fight him, but the Lord empowered me — and I struck Goliath dead."

As a butler in Babylon, Nehemiah risked his life as a wine taster for the king. But Nehemiah's boast in God was different: "I rebuilt a city to restore honor to God's name." With God's name mocked in Jerusalem's streets, Nehemiah felt a fire in his belly — and he set about rebuilding the walls.

Moses' testimony wasn't, "I lived in Pharaoh's palace and had great authority." His boast was, "God spoke to me from a burning bush — and I confronted Pharaoh, saying, 'Let my people go.'" His boast was heard at the Red Sea: "Egypt's army has drowned in the sea!"

New Testament believers had the same boast. Stephen was a deacon who distributed food to widows — a good testimony in itself. But his boast-worthy testimony came when he preached to an unbelieving crowd. His anointed sermon so provoked the people they took up stones to kill him. Stephen's testimony was twofold: He was the first martyr of the church, and his faithful sacrifice would later impact a Jewish zealot named Saul.

I have yet to meet a Christian who hasn't wondered, "Isn't there something more to this life in Christ? When will we see God's power made manifest in this generation?" Maybe you're facing something that requires God's intervention. It's no time to say, "I'll go to church more." It's time to say, "I trust God to demonstrate his power in my life. He's going to save my marriage, to rescue my kids, to impact my coworkers. He'll give me a boast-worthy testimony."

This message is not meant to be a guilt trip. It is meant to stir a passion in our hearts — a passion too often repressed by fear and doubt. Some have set aside their faith for so long they no longer believe they can have a boast-worthy testimony. God's Word says differently.

A boast-worthy testimony is not always what we think.

The book of Hebrews mentions two types of testimonies. We all prefer the first kind, when saints conquered kingdoms, destroyed the enemy, slew giants. The second kind of testimony is altogether different: Christians were sawed in half, they starved, they froze, they hid in caves. And yet Hebrews says these were boast-worthy. Stephen's testimony was, "I put my life on the line for my Savior. I was willing to be martyred if it might reach one man like Saul." It did.

It's too easy for Christians today to live off the testimonies of others. How often do we catch ourselves saying, "Have you heard about the spiritual awakening in Africa?" "The church in America does a great work among the poor." "Our church has opened its doors to reach drug addicts." We should rejoice in the faithfulness of everyone making a difference in Christ's name. But Paul refused to live vicariously through another's work: "Nor do we boast and claim credit for the work someone else has done. Instead, we hope that your faith will grow so that the boundaries of our work among you will be extended" (2 Corinthians 10:15, NLT).

You may think your life doesn't measure up — that you don't deserve a boast-worthy testimony. That is not the issue. Everything can change with one simple prayer of faith. Just before I preached recently, a woman in church told me about something that had happened that week. After thirty-eight years of being addicted to marijuana, God had set her free. It happened through a simple visit from two lay ministers in our church. As they sat praying with her, she grew convicted over the pot in her apartment. She got up and threw it out.

The woman's deliverance was real and lasting. She has obtained a boast-worthy testimony of God's power to deliver. And the two lay ministers have a testimony as well. God used them in a way they couldn't have orchestrated. All three can say, "Look at what God did in our midst today."

With even the smallest beginning, faith starts to rise up in our hearts. We realize, "God did it last week. He can do it again this week." I want to boast that our church has powerfully effective ministries that were launched just this way — because an individual was faithful to help one person. In every case, a believer's prayerful act led to a counseling ministry, a mercy ministry, a discipleship ministry and more. The same can be true for every believer. As we build a history of boast-worthy testimonies, our faith will grow to seek God for greater things.

Small beginnings eventually affect entire communities. When my father, David Wilkerson, started a church in Times Square, the main area on 42nd Street was a darkened mess. Every few feet there was a drug dealer or a prostitute or a hawker for a porn theater. My dad's approach to any ministry was always to begin in prayer — and he asked me to lead a Friday night prayer meeting at the church.

Those first meetings drew twenty to thirty people. We faithfully cried out for God to bring change to the city. Over time, our meetings grew to almost eight hundred people. As we lifted our voices in traveling prayer, God placed a burden on our hearts for 42nd Street. So we took our praying efforts to the street, where we handed out tracts.

Soon we noticed changes taking place. There were fewer drug addicts and prostitutes. One by one the porn palaces closed. Finally, a developer came in and bought up property after property. Today, the principal presence in Times Square — once a playground for porn, drugs and prostitution — is the Walt Disney Company. 42nd Street may now be the most wholesome block in New York City. I believe it's partly due to a praying people who believed God to do great things.

Our faith is meant to help others have a boast-worthy testimony.

The first effect of a boast-worthy testimony is the building of our faith. The second effect is the building up of others' faith: "I may seem to be boasting too much about the authority given to us by the Lord. But our authority builds you up; it doesn't tear you down" (2 Corinthians 10:8, NLT). Paul is saying, in essence, "Not only did God work mightily through my life. His work in me and through me is meant to stir up your faith to greater works." Our faith is contagious. It builds up the faith of others to engage in greater acts of boldness.

Paul's final boast is a curious one: "If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am" (11:30). His point is this: Our boastworthy testimony will never result from our own strength. Our boast will always be, "Without God, I am not a giant slayer — I am a shepherd." "I am not a wall builder — I am a cup bearer." "I am not a deliverer — I am a shepherd wandering in the Egyptian desert."

Our boast-worthy testimony will never come from our own strength, zeal or effort. If we lean on any of these things, our testimony will lose its power. But the more we acknowledge our inability, the more God's power will rest on us: "He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9, ESV).

There is a strength available to us that isn't given to the proud, the arrogant, the self-sufficient. It is given only to those who humbly fall on their faces and say, "Jesus, I want a boast-worthy testimony. Only you can give me that. I want to make a difference in the dark world of this generation. I want to be your light." That is my prayer in these times. May it be yours as well!

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