Session 33: Telling Your Story Safely: Testimony Without Harm

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Timer; Workbooks (My Story — written version, three-part outline); the Session 33 handout (My Story: Three Minutes, Safely)

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Structure a testimony in three movements — what it was like, what happened, what it is like now — with time weights favoring the present
- Apply the safety rules: no graphic use detail, no naming-and-shaming others, no telling another person's story
- Deliver a three-minute version and receive structured feedback

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 4 — Living Free. The one idea today is that a safe story is engineered — a fifth what it was like, a fifth what happened, the rest what it is like now. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. A safe story is engineered, not improvised: a fifth on what it was like, a fifth on what happened, and the rest on what it is like now — no scenes, no naming-and-shaming, nobody else's story told as yours. Today we build the three-minute version and practice it in trios — one delivery, with feedback in a fixed order.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: "Whose story — heard in a meeting, a church, or a kitchen — most changed what you believed was possible for you? What made it land?" Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

A safe testimony is engineered, not improvised. Structure: what it was like (brief, honest, no scenes — the audience's imagination needs no assistance, and graphic detail triggers listeners and glorifies the old life), what happened (the turn: the people, the program, the moment surrender became direction), and what it is like now (the longest section: practices, people, evidence, and honest unfinished business). Safety rules protect everyone: we do not name people we harmed or who harmed us in identifiable ways, we do not tell anyone else's story as our illustration, we do not present timelines or outcomes we cannot support, and we respect the setting — a church congregation, a recovery meeting, and a family dinner each get the version sized for them. Telling our story also consolidates our own identity (Session 31): narrating the new chapter, accurately and repeatedly, is one of the ways it becomes the truest thing about us.

- **The turn is the testimony** Listeners in the pit do not need our pit described better — they need the ladder located. The ‘what happened’ section always names reachable help: this program, these practices, these people.
- **Present tense carries the weight** A story that is 80 percent using and 20 percent rescue argues for the using life. We invert the old ratio on purpose: roughly a fifth before, a fifth the turn, and the rest now.
- **Unfinished is credible** 'And here is what is still hard, and what I do about it' makes a testimony believable to exactly the people who discount polished ones. Perfection is the least persuasive genre in recovery.
- **Consent travels with the story** Participants decide where their story is told and recorded. The program never records, posts, or publishes a testimony without written consent, and a 'no' costs the person nothing.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Narrative identity research examines how the stories people construct about their lives relate to well-being and agency (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Key sources for this session: McAdams & McLean (2013); Bandura (1977); Kelly et al. (2011). Evidence strength: Moderate. Spiritual practice: Testimony — correlates with narrative identity work, modeling, and self-efficacy; evidence: Moderate (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Bandura, 1977). Full citations: Appendix H. The session’s Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, “What part of that sounds most like your life right now?” Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Time your story: which movement currently eats the minutes — and what will you cut to fix the ratio?
2. What detail do you habitually include that this session says to drop? Why do you think you keep it?
3. Who is the specific audience your three-minute version is built for?
4. What 'still hard, still working' line belongs in your ending?

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Testimony workshop (12 minutes): the facilitator delivers a model testimony first, at exactly three minutes. Then one participant delivers a three-minute testimony and receives feedback in a fixed order — one thing that landed, one place the ratio slipped, one line worth keeping word-for-word. Three deliveries do not fit in 12 minutes, so this segment runs a model, one delivery, and feedback only; the other deliveries are cut from this segment and move to partner practice or homework. Volunteers may offer a full-group delivery; no one is required to.

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Deliver your testimony once this week to a real (safe) audience of one or more — coach, community contact, family member who asked — and write three lines on how it went. The written version goes into your workbook behind your 90-day plan. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Facilitators stop any delivery that turns graphic, names an identifiable victim or alleged abuser, or becomes a confession of an unaddressed crime — pause kindly, restate the safety rule for the whole room without spotlighting the teller, and follow up privately the same day. If a story reveals a current safety risk, the Crisis Protocol and reporting policy govern. Cut first if time runs short: Discussion question 1 and the ratio-bullet discussion. Never cut the practice or the feedback order.

Closing (2 minutes)

Unfinished is credible. Deliver your story once this week to a real, safe audience, and write three lines on how it went. Next week: staying connected — the communities and people who carry a graduate.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐