

## No “Road to Damascus” The Example of Timothy’s Conversion

By Nathan Albright

For anyone who is a Christian or who is exploring Christianity as a faith, the issue of conversion may be one of its most difficult concepts. Conversion means, “to change.” But when does this happen? Is this change sudden and dramatic? Or, can it be more gradual and difficult to detect? Furthermore, is conversion different for one who grew up in the true faith as opposed to one who came into the true faith from the outside? The life of the evangelist Timothy provides some keen insight into this question.

### Timothy’s Upbringing

In his second epistle to Timothy, the apostle Paul reveals the remarkable heritage of faith of one of Christianity’s greatest figures. It also reveals something about the spiritual path this young evangelist would take.

I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.” (2 Tim. 1:3-5)

Like many of those in the Church of God today, Timothy came from a believing household. When explaining Timothy’s duties as a Christian and as a pastor, Paul reminded him of this heritage. His was a household that contained genuine believers—a family that instructed him and set a proper example for him as a youth. The value of this experience can be of great benefit if respected and honored. After all, those who are born into the truth do not have to learn from the same set of horrible experiences suffered by many who come from a life ignorant of the true God. Those like Timothy have the opportunity of growing up in a believing home and can mature gradually into the full knowledge of God and His plan. This is a wonderful gift that should never be taken for granted or disregarded. Furthermore, it is nothing to ever be ashamed of.

### The Importance of a Good Mentor

However, for a young person’s faith to grow to its fullest potential, it is most beneficial to find a mentor—a positive adult role model (even if those are difficult to find sometimes). In Acts 16, we see Paul and Silas discovering Timothy, a young man with a Christian mother but an unbelieving father who came with a good reputation from his congregation. Paul was so impressed with this young man (who was probably only a teenager), that he took him along with him.

It is a shame such things do not occur that often today. In this day and age, problems of divorce and the general cultural collapse of proper parenting have left scores of young people without suitable parental role models. Timothy’s own father was an unbeliever, and thus did not present a suitable guide to a Christian life. However, by taking the young man under his wing, Paul was able to provide mentorship for the young future leader in God’s Church. With this in mind, it is vital for young people in God’s Church today to have mentors to show them good

examples of how adults (and Christians) should behave. Without these examples it can be very difficult for young people to learn how to live successful Christian lives in today's world.

## The Importance of Handling Responsibility

A large portion of the mentoring that Paul provided Timothy was not only in instruction on the law (where Paul was, as a trained rabbi, no doubt skilled), nor merely in personal example (though that too was vital), but also in practical opportunities to demonstrate a capacity for handling responsibility, which leads to greater maturity and the handling of even greater responsibility in the future. Even early on in Timothy's work with Paul, we see that Paul sent him as the assistant to Silas to deal with the churches in Macedonia (Acts 18). Thus, even as a young man, Timothy was dealing with a real missionary work in a very responsible manner.

Then in Acts 20, we find that Timothy was part of an advance party sent to prepare for Paul's arrival in Troas, a city in Asia Minor. Based on the salutation at the closings of Paul's Epistles, we find that Timothy was a valued fellow worker of this great apostle (Romans 16:21). By sharing in Paul's work and experiences, Timothy had become a very able and devoted young practitioner of the truths of God.

## A Major Challenge

The scriptures reveal that while Timothy was still in his 30's, that Paul decided to send him on a difficult task to teach the brethren in Ephesus. The challenge was especially demanding because, then as now, young people were not well respected in positions of authority. Moreover, Timothy was a timid young man (2 Timothy 1:7-9) who may have found great difficulty in being resolute and strong. However, even here Paul did not leave him without help, for he wrote two beautiful and touching letters advising Timothy on how to properly navigate the waters he was in. In these letters Timothy was given valuable advice (which we too can take advantage of) concerning how to deal with those who may look down on us because we are young. In them he was told to always set a proper example and to treat other people with dignity and respect. Additionally, Timothy was given the charge of teaching the correct doctrine to the people of Ephesus, and in finding other people capable of teaching and gently guiding God's people. Paul also gave this young champion of faith another difficult task—to come and visit him, a condemned criminal, before he dies, and to bring with him some valuable parchments, which may have included the scriptures (2 Timothy 4:9-13).

Paul's end on earth was now near at hand, but we can rest assured that Timothy had used the example of his mentor wisely. The last words in the Bible we find about this now mature evangelist are recorded in Hebrews 13:23, where he has just been set free (presumably from prison). So we can be comforted that Timothy did go to Paul as the apostle had requested, and had taken courage to fulfill this difficult task.

## The Final Thought

What can be learned by the life and conversion of one of Christianity's most trusted servants? The answer is subtle but powerful. You see: the conversion of Timothy (as it is for many young people in God's Church today) was gradual, but that is not a bad thing. What it meant was a lifetime of service to God and brethren, as well as a continual and gradual growing into responsibility and knowledge. It most definitely was not without its problems—for Timothy, like many of us, struggled with issues and needed guidance. However, the lessons of this young man turned Christian hero are worthy of our attention. For this wonderful evangelist who in growing up in the faith, being properly mentored by a trusted adult, and in growing into his responsibilities can be an inspiration for all of us who are young and grew up in the truth. One needs no road to Damascus in order to be a valuable Christian. God is with all of us, even (or maybe even especially) those who are born and reared into His ways.