

What it Takes to See Someone Become a Christian

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My greatest desire for my children is for them to become followers of Jesus. I'm sure you feel similarly about your children, other family members, friends, and even those who hate you for your faith in Christ. But what will it take for them to become Christians? By evaluating Timothy's conversion, we'll have a solid answer.



First, it takes gospel proclamation. In 2nd Timothy 3:15, Paul mentions that “from childhood” Timothy was “acquainted with the sacred writings.” How did that happen? He probably heard the Old Testament Scriptures from his grandmother Eunice and his mother Lois (see 2nd Timothy 1:5). This was all preparatory for understanding the arrival and work of Christ in redemptive history.

Think specifically about the role of mothers in the life of a child. They have a history-altering opportunity. Charles Spurgeon once wrote to mothers:

You are called to equip the future man of God, that he may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. If God spares you, you may live to hear that pretty boy speak to thousands, and you will have the sweet reflection in your heart that the quiet teachings of the nursery led the man to love his God and serve Him (*Come Ye Children*, Christian Focus, pages 111-2).

And then one day in Lystra the apostle Paul arrived and proclaimed the gospel (Acts 14:8ff), leading to the salvation of Timothy's mother and grandmother, but not initially of Timothy. Paul mentions how “faith...first dwelt” in Timothy's grandma and mother (2nd Timothy 1:5). We can assume that they then urged Timothy to believe, and no doubt the change that the gospel made in these ladies' lives would have been compelling to young Timothy and instrumental in his conversion (cf. 3:14).

If we want to see anyone become a Christian, we've got to give them the good news. That might come in various forms, like conversing with them over a cup (or pot) of coffee, giving them an evangelistic book or a New Testament, or inviting them to a church meeting.

Second, it takes a divine visitation. This is not explicitly stated in the verses related to Timothy's conversion, but it's easily deduced from certain language Paul uses. For example, he mentions “the sacred writings, which

are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (3:15). What causes someone to be “made wise”? Their intellectual capabilities? No, one is “made wise” through the sovereign work of God upon the heart. It's like what Paul said about the opponents of Timothy: “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2:25).

I recently received a wonderful note from a lady who was a member of the first church I served as a pastor. Here's a portion of what she wrote:

After about 20 years of prayer and witnessing, my dad is showing fruit of repentance and faith. For the last four years I'd given up praying much as he'd become more and more hostile to the truth, but left it in the Lord's hands praying that He would give him eyes to see and ears to hear as Jesus told in his parables in Matthew...

In the fall his younger brother was diagnosed with stomach cancer and doesn't know Christ. I called my uncle to tell him about Christ and my dad got wind of it. Then one conversation on the phone with my dad in November seemed to bring everything together. I shared the *same* gospel message and answered the *same* questions my dad had been asking for 10+ years, but this time the Lord opened his eyes. He admitted sin was his greatest problem, that Jesus was the only one who could and can and has solved that problem, and that there is no other way to God. He then went on his own accord and bought a large print Bible...and has been reading every verse I text him and whole chapters.

For twenty years he refused saying it was too hard to understand. Now he's texting for interpretation on verses.

Only God can do this!

Third, it takes a personal decision. In 2nd Timothy 3:15, Paul speaks of “salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,” and Paul tells Timothy, “I am reminded of *your* sincere faith” (1:5). This trust in Christ was Timothy's personal response to the gospel, and it was a persevering faith (“a faith that...dwells in you”).

Avoid calling for any responses to the gospel that are not biblically required (like a “sinner's prayer”). Instead, give the gospel, urge repentance and faith, and trust the Lord. This is the only way to see that child, or coworker, or relative, or neighbor, or enemy, become a Christian.