

Strands of Conversion

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ACTS 26:12-18 'With this in mind, I was travelling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, **13** when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. **14** When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads." **15** I asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The Lord answered, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. **16** But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. **17** I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you **18** to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

ACTS 10:30-33, 44-47 Cornelius replied, 'Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. **31** He said, "Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. **32** Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea." **33** Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.' ...

44 While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. **45** The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, **46** for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, **47** 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'



What do you notice about conversion in each of the passages?

Gordon Smith in *Beginning Well* defines conversion as a series of events that God uses to equip a person for a lifetime of transformation and mission. Smith suggests seven strands that a person must engage with or embrace for a “good conversion” to occur. He uses the word “strand” because it represents components of conversion that God has likely been building toward in one’s life for years. The assumption is that God’s grace is constantly at work in the lives of those not yet converted.

Each strand is distinct but interrelated. The order and timing in which one embraces these components will be unique for each person and are not hoops to be jumped through. Usually a person will have an experience with one or more of the seven strands that creates a “tipping point, or moment that crystallizes their commitment to becoming a follower of Jesus. There are “little c” and “Big C” conversions along the way that signify that something profound has happened in that person’s journey toward Christ.

	STRAND	SCRIPTURE	APPROACHES	CONVERSION INITIATION	COMMENTS:
INTERNAL		Acts 8:29-39 Acts 10:9-23 John 3:1-15	Answering questions; clarifying mistruths; Challenge/Allegory	Belief in Gospel	
		Acts 26: 12-18 John 8: 1-11	Enables someone to see their sin and He is quick to show mercy	Confession of sin/ Repentance	
		Acts 8: 29-39 John 4: 1-26	Love someone into a trusting relationship with Him	Relationship/Trust Joy/ Assurance of forgiveness	
		Acts 26: 12-18 Mark 10:17-31	Helping to transfer our loyalties	Allegiance to God; God’s purposes	
EXTERNAL		Acts 10: 24-48 Acts 14: 1-7	Prayer for the empowerment of the God through the Holy Spirit	Empowerment	
		Acts 8: 29-39 Acts 10: 47-48	Invitation to embrace and participate in the death & resurrection of Jesus	Outward statement of commitment; the physical body’s participation	
		Acts 10: 1-48 Acts 26: 12-18	Reconciliation; Church	Receiving love and help from the Body	



Journal Suggestion

It is helpful to be in touch with the full breadth of our own journey of conversion. Most, when asked about their story, recall only a narrow portion. The more we are know about how God has worked in our lives, the better we will be at discerning his work in others – and calling their attention to it. Can we describe in our own journeys where we have seen these seven strands? Smith encourages us to write a spiritual autobiography.

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Acts 8—Eunuch admits he doesn't understand and needs clarity—an intellectual understanding is needed; sacramental--water baptism; emotional--joy

Acts 26: Clarity about what Paul is doing wrong, persecuting Jesus, but done with Paul's best in mind. He is being rescued. God wants Paul's allegiance for Paul's sake and also for the sake of the Kingdom—the Gentile community.

Acts 10: Clarity and understanding-- Cornelius speaking about God's preparation of his heart; The Holy Spirit's empowerment--charismatic; community b/w Jews and Gentiles; baptism:

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INTERNAL	Intellectual	Acts 8:29-39 Acts 10:9-23 John 3:1-15	Answering questions; clarifying mistruths; Challenge/Allegory	Belief in Gospel	In this strand the need is for clarity for the sake of belief. Clarity could come in through the non-christian’s own awareness or someone helping them see what they lack. Jesus does this with Nicodemus, the Holy Spirit does this for Cornelius.
	Penititive	Acts 26: 12-18 John 8: 1-11	Enables someone to see their sin and He is quick to show mercy	Confession of sin/ Repentance	“It’s your kindness that leads to repentance” An awareness of sin allows for a turning away from it and is accompanied by God’s love and grace.
	Affecitive	Acts 8: 29-39 John 4: 1-26	Love someone into a trusting relationship with Him	Relationship/Trust Joy/ Assurance of forgiveness	For both the Ethiopian eunuch and the woman at the well, they experience joy in their conversion. Their joy is an overflow from the new sense of security. Thy trust Jesus and want relationship with Him
	Volitional	Acts 26: 12-18 Mark 10:17-31	Helping to transfer our loyalties	Allegiance to God; God’s purposes	Paul’s conversion was about commitment to Jesus. The rich young ruler was proposed the choice—could he sell everything? Selling everything was what was needed for a complete transfer of allegiance to take place.
EXTERNAL	Charismatic	Acts 10: 24-48 Acts 14: 1-7	Prayer for the empowerment of the God through the Holy Spirit	Empowerment	There are a variety of beliefs related to how you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Whatever the church tradition, the emphasis is on receiving the gift offered to every believer.
	Water baptism	Acts 8: 29-39 Acts 10: 47-48	Invitation to embrace and participate in the death & resurrection of Jesus	Outward statement of commitment; the physical body’s participation	Water baptism is a key strand because it signifies that the physical body has a role in conversion. It also is part of someone identifying themselves with the Body of Christ
	Communal	Acts 10: 1-48 Acts 26: 12-18	Reconciliation; Church	Receiving love and help from the Body	Conversion ultimately is not completed alone, we need others involved for our long-term growth and transformation.



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