

Acts 9 “Transformation”

3rd June 2018

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I've always loved convertible cars. Never owned one. But they just look so cool when they're converted!

Conversion is a word that means “change”. A convertible is a car that can **change**. And conversion for a Christian is about change. But it's not always a change that is as cool as a convertible car!

Saul's conversion story is very cool. The Damascus road experience. Lights and voices from heaven. But not every Christian has a conversion story that is a “Damascus road experience”. Conversion doesn't always involve a “flash of light from heaven”. Your conversion story may not be dramatic, or cool. But your conversion, EVERY conversion in fact, is an **amazing** act of God's work in changing a person's life.

Acts 9 tells us 2 very important things about **every Christian faith conversion**. If you are a Christian, these things are true of you, whether your conversion was “a Damascus road experience” or not. And if you are **not** a Christian, this is what you can expect if you become a Christian.

1. Conversion is the work of **God reaching us**.

He may not speak to us with a voice from heaven. But people are converted, because God has done a great work in their life.

I've been a Christian all my life. I can't remember a time when I was not a Christian. I've had clear moments of God's intervention in my life. But I don't have a Damascus road experience for my conversion. But I do know that my conversion was God's work. That's what Acts 9 shows us. **God reaches us**. It just looks different for each person.

• Teaching

When I was a teacher, there were times I had to ask students to “adjust” their behaviour. Sometimes a gentle word or a tap on the shoulder was all that was required. Sometimes, even just a sideways glance would do the trick. But sometimes, not even a megaphone would work!

Sometimes people just need a gentle tap on the shoulder from God. Be thankful if that was you! Be thankful if it was so gentle that you barely remember the precise moment!

Saul needed a megaphone.

3... suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

Be thankful when God doesn't need to knock you to the ground with flashing lights! Be thankful when you don't need to be blinded or humbled like Saul.

But any conversion, whether you're struck down or you have a gentle tap on the shoulder, is the work of **God reaching us**.

2. Conversion is a life transformed by an encounter with Jesus

Look at the way God transformed Saul's life:

Verse 3: Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples.

The phrase used here for "breathing out" talks about Saul being like a wild animal. Out of control. Prowling around. Going out of his way to lock up the Christians. He was out to **get** them.

And then... transformation.

Saul was on a 250 kilometre 1 week journey from Jerusalem to Damascus. When he's almost there, he meets Jesus.

Verse 4: He fell to the ground

God knocked him off his feet. He was an out of control wild animal.

Verse 5: "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,"

Verse 9: For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

He was humbled by God. Here was a man who was on top of everyone. And God brought him to his knees.

Then he went and saw Ananias...

Verse 18: Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again

Verse 20: At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

So the man who was breathing murderous threats against God's people is now preaching the gospel of Jesus. His whole life, and message, and purpose, were transformed by an encounter with Jesus.

It's not about having a historical understanding of who Jesus is. It's not about reading a book about Jesus and deciding that he is a good teacher.

Conversion is about a **personal encounter with Jesus**. It's about recognising that he is King and Lord over our lives, and that he wants to be in a personal relationship with us.

- **Self-serve checkouts**

I know I often go on about those self-serve checkouts in supermarkets. But it's a great example for this. Those self-serve checkouts will get the job done. They make sense. They can save time. Sometimes. They are efficient at checking out your groceries and taking your money. They make sense. But some days I just want to go through a normal checkout with a real person.

Because we are built for relationship. We're made in the image of God. God doesn't want us to **find** Jesus as a great teacher or a role model. He wants us to **know him** personally. To encounter him. Conversion is about encountering Jesus in a personal way.

So... Conversion is the work of God reaching us. And it's a work of transformation that happens by encountering Jesus.

- **Convertibles**

But Christian conversion isn't like a convertible car that changes back and forth and back and forth.

So what are the signs of a transformed, converted life? If God has reached me, and I have been transformed because I've encountered Jesus, what should my life look like now? Every day?

1. **Conversion should transform our relationships**

I love Ananias in this chapter. At first, he is afraid.

Verse 13: “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem.”

He’s scared of meeting Saul the persecutor. But when Saul arrives, look at what Ananias does:

Verse 17: “Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul,...”

Brother Saul. Conversion brings us into a new family. Ananias didn’t know Saul. He was afraid of Saul, but welcomes him as a **brother**. If we are transformed, we now live as part of a family.

2. Conversion should transform our whole life

God changed Saul. He can change anyone. He changed a man who was like a wild animal going after Christians, to become a man who risked his own life for that same Jesus he once persecuted.

Maybe as a Christian, you have accepted Jesus as Lord, but you have not allowed him to transform your whole life. Maybe you’re a **Convertible Christian**, instead of a **Converted Christian**. Maybe you have a tendency to change back and forth. Christian on Sunday, but not really at work for example.

So how do we live as Christians whose lives are **completely** transformed? Let me give you 4 areas – maybe one of them will speak specifically to you:

- Head
- Heart
- Wallet
- Watch

1. Head. If you’re a student, or an academic, if you like learning and education, if you like reading books, that means your constantly transforming your mind. Think about this: You’re devoting time to your head – learning about the world.

What about taking time to transform your head, your thinking, with God’s word. Read the Bible. Read Christian books. Enrol in courses to study theology. Engage your head with God-thinking.

A transformed life means a transformed head. Transformed thinking.

2. Heart. How much do you think about your health? How often do you see your doctor? How much of your life do you spend looking after your physical needs? Taking vitamins. Playing sport. Going to the gym. Eating at restaurants.

What about your spiritual needs? Your heart needs? A transformed life means a transformed heart. Devote time to your spiritual heart needs. Devotion to Church. Devotion to prayer. Devotion to others in your church family.

A transformed life means a transformed heart. Look after your **spiritual** needs.

3. Wallet. If you’re rich, or you spend a lot of time worrying about money, or earning money, or spending money... transform your finances.

Transform your wallet to be a kingdom asset. Take every dollar you have as a gift from God, and transform the purposes of your spending. Transform your financial goals with spiritual purpose. Do you know Australians spend an average of \$77 a WEEK on holidays. \$4,000 a year. Each. We know how to invest in ourselves. Do we know how to invest in God’s kingdom?

A transformed life means a transformed wallet.

Finally,

Watch: Time. Do you spend a lot of time on social media? Watching TV? Movies? Do you work overtime too much? On AVERAGE, Australians spend 100 minutes a DAY on social media. Some of us are spending more than that! Much more! But how many minutes a DAY do we devote to our faith life?

A transformed life means transforming how we spend our time.

A transformed life means our head, heart, wallet and watch are transformed. Let me encourage you to pick one of those areas to transform this week.

Let me finish with a story!

I got a bicycle about 10 years ago. I had all my riding gear. I felt very professional. On one of my first rides, I was almost home, and I pulled up at a set of lights, and I had literally not stopped pedalling ALL morning. The bike stopped for the first time that day. And I left my feet on the pedals. I forgot to put them down on the ground. So the bike just... tipped over. And I fell off. Three lanes of traffic. On a bridge. My water bottle went rolling off into the gutter.

Then the lights changed.

And there I was, sprawled out all over the middle of the road.

Some days I feel like that as a Christian. You just tip over. And you're thinking "How did that happen?" Did I fall down? Was I pushed? Did God strike me down? How did I fall?

Transformation is an ongoing part of our lives as Christians. When we're converted, like Saul, God reaches us, but then he keeps transforming us. And we need to keep letting him do that. Let him into your head, your heart, your wallet, your watch. We tip over when we don't put our feet down on solid ground. When we don't anchor ourselves with God. When we stop allowing God to transform us. When we stop taking the next step.

Let's pray.

Outline

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