

# Wings

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*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



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## Incentives to Conversion

The Philippian jailor was an unlikely conversion prospect. The factors that contributed to his conversion provide lessons for our evangelism today.

“And the keeper of the prison . . . called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” (Ac. 16:27,29, 30).

In many cases, people who are converted to Christ do so after a long, sometimes difficult process of teaching and persuasion. Yet in the case of the Philippian jailer, Paul and Silas had the candidate coming to them begging for guidance on how to get right with God. It would be nice if every conversion was this quick and easy.

But the jailer’s conversion was not a fluke. There was a perfect convergence of two factors that made it almost inevitable that he would come to Paul and Silas with this question. A knowledge of those factors can help improve our evangelism efforts today.

The first and most obvious factor in his conversion was the close brush with death he had just encountered. As a Roman soldier, this jailer was responsible for the prisoners under his charge. If any escaped, he would be executed for

his failure. In the chaos following the earthquake (v. 29), the jailer assumed his prisoners had escaped, and was on the verge of committing suicide. Only the quick intervention of Paul saved him (v. 27-28). When a man comes that close to the abyss, he gets religion real fast.

But why did the jailer seek out Paul and Silas with his question about salvation? As far as we know, they had made no overt effort to teach the man prior to this encounter. Reconstruct the prior events of this evening, however, and the reason comes into sharper focus. When the jailer threw Paul and Silas in the stocks, they did not behave as ordinary inmates. Instead, they prayed and sang hymns to God (v. 25). Accustomed to dealing with the dregs of society, the jailer saw in these two men something remarkably different, something positive and uplifting—even though they had just been beaten and thrown in a dungeon. So even though the jailer was asleep when the earthquake struck, he had seen and heard enough to know that these men had a special gift, an insight into life that kept them calm in the face

of a terrible ordeal. Whatever it was, the jailer wanted that gift, too. Having just stood on the brink of death, the jailer knew immediately who he needed to talk to. After a short period of instruction, the jailer and his family were baptized that very night (v. 32-33).

In summary, the Philippian jailer was an easy conversion because (1) he had just been through a traumatic experience, and (2) he was already familiar with the remarkable faith of two men who had come to his rescue during that experience.

The same formula can, and often does, work today. If we let our light shine before others every day—not quoting Bible, but displaying a cheerful, positive spirit, no matter what happens, and coming to the aid of people when they get in a jam—they will turn to us for guidance. We will never have more eager listeners of the gospel message.

We should never wish evil upon others to “get their attention.” But knowing that tragedies will happen, we should conduct ourselves in a way that naturally attracts the victims to us.

– David King