

## The Adventures of Timmy the Turtle: Timmy at the Pond

**Frank Goddard**

AuthorHouse (Apr 19, 2013)

Softcover \$14.95 (24pp)

978-1-4817-3545-2

*This lesson on prayer and adventurous spirit is accentuated by clear writing and expressive illustrations.*

In Frank Goddard's picture book *The Adventures of Timmy the Turtle: Timmy at the Pond*, a turtle grows up and leaves his familiar surroundings to find his new, wider environment offers not only novel discoveries but also unforeseen dangers.

As a young turtle, Timmy lives inside a fish tank with four clear glass walls. He longs to go beyond the walls and doesn't understand the invisible forces keeping him contained. As he grows bigger, Timmy is moved to a small pond, with almost everything a turtle could want.

Timmy's explorer spirit prompts him to go even farther, though, and he sets out on a journey of discovery, finding new foods and new friends. Homesickness creeps up on him, and when a lawn mower bears down on him, he prays for rescue, wishing he was back at the old pond. He is promptly rescued and returned home by the man with the lawn mower.

The illustrations in *The Adventures of Timmy the Turtle* are very good, with colorful characters whose emotions are easy to discern. The problem is the story. After a good amount of setup, Timmy goes out into the world, has new experiences, and becomes homesick. All of this seems natural—if Timmy then decided to return home, with a new appreciation for his life there, the story could work. If Timmy overcame his doubts and homesickness and continued his explorations, that too might make a good final turn of the plot. Either would present some growth in Timmy's character. But instead, Timmy faces a dangerous situation, prays, and is rescued.

The moral of the story seems to be that prayers will be answered—there's no indication that the man spotting Timmy is anything but providence, and the last page features Timmy smiling and looking to the sky with a thumbs-up gesture, thinking, "Thank you, God!" Regardless of the reader's religious beliefs, this sort of *deus ex machina* doesn't make for a compelling story or a heroic character.

The text is generally clear and easy to understand, though there are a couple of confusing tense changes, as when Timmy sets out on his journey and marvels: "*Boy, was it a big world out there!*" The italics and quotation marks indicate a direct quote from Timmy, but the past tense doesn't fit—"Boy, it's a big world out here!" would seem a more appropriate choice of words.

Readers looking to encourage prayer may find *The Adventures of Timmy the Turtle* an appealing way to reinforce that habit. But the story's message might appeal to a wider audience if it portrayed a higher power moving in less explicit, more mysterious ways.

PETER DABBENE (September 23, 2013)

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