

LETTER FROM CARTER CONLON

Dear Friend,

Today I am reminded of verses 2 and 3 of Psalm 23: "*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.*" They speak of the supernatural peace that comes to the child of God who simply says, "Lord, Your ways are right. Your promises are true. Your victory is complete. Your hand upon me is all that I need to get through the trials that I face every day. Jesus, I love You and I trust You to guide me and comfort me each day for the rest of my journey."

Some people try to survive by engaging in a flurry of exhaustive religion. This is what Israel's leaders and the 450 prophets did in 1 Kings 18. In contrast, Elijah quietly and confidently built another altar—an altar of trust and confidence in God. It was to this altar that the presence of the Lord came.

If you are exhausted from your efforts to find rest in your soul, do this right now. Sit down in a comfortable place, put your head back, close your eyes, and say: "Jesus, thank You for loving me. I trust You."

Yours in Christ,



Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

STARVING THE WORK OF CHRIST

by Carter Conlon

In the world today many people experience so much pain their goal is simply to make it through one day at a time. Life is mere existence, nothing more. Crippled by the cruelty of others, they cannot live as God fully intended and are cynical towards ever being truly healed. The unfortunate truth is that most of these wounds have occurred within the framework of the home. The place you expect to find unconditional love and support is instead the location of terrible memories. It is here where betrayals and bitter disappointments have marred the lives of many, allowing unforgiveness to take root. Statistics continue to prove that homes are some of the most violent places on earth. There needs to be healing for these troubled families. In the Word of God we find hope and promise for this. If you are one of the people I have described, then God desires to bring you healing and deliverance.

■ REMEMBERING THE PAIN OF THE PAST

In the Old Testament, Joseph provides us with an example of someone who was deeply wounded by family members. His own brothers, gripped by hatred and jealousy, cast him into a pit to die. Later they seized an opportunity to sell him into slavery. He was then transported into Egypt where his suffering continued. There Joseph was falsely accused and imprisoned. After a number of years he was

miraculously released and promoted to second in command over Egypt. In this position he controlled all the storehouses of grain. This placed him in a powerful situation to be a provider for the starving masses. During a time of prophesied drought, he met his brothers head-on as they came from Canaan to Egypt in search of food. Their sudden appearance evoked many raw emotions. Instantly their presence confronted him with the past grief of his early life.

*Joseph,
recognizing
his brothers,
must have
been standing
on a
precipice
of great
indecision.*

Imagine for a moment all the painful memories which suddenly flooded his mind, taking him back to the time of his betrayal. Did he instantly remember the sick feeling in the pit of his stomach, when on that day so long ago, he heard his own flesh and blood conspiring to kill him? Did a sense of outrage now wash

over him at the remembrance of the cold and calculating words spoken as they bargained for his sale price? Did Joseph recall the tormenting fear and panic which paralyzed him when “they bruised his feet with fetters and placed his neck in an iron collar” (Psalm 105:18, NLT)? Was he once more calling to mind his pleading glances which said, “Help me, do something, I’m your brother!” Did Joseph remember his astonished unbelief at their blank, unconcerned stares as not one of his brothers lifted a finger to halt his pain or agony? And now, these same hardened and pitiless men were standing before him with their hands outstretched, begging for food and pleading for their own safety and preservation. There they were, oblivious to the reality that this powerful Egyptian ruler before them was in fact the brother they had so despised. Joseph, having instantly recognized them, must have been standing on a precipice of great indecision. His mind raced; should he forgive them or not? Does he reach out in undeserved loving kindness or not? Does he repay their past indifferences by letting them suffer or does he give into their requests?

“Joseph could stand it no longer. There were many people in the room, and he said to his attendants, ‘Out, all of you!’ So he was alone with his brothers when he told them who he was. Then he broke down and wept. He wept so loudly the Egyptians could hear him, and word of it quickly carried to Pharaoh’s palace. ‘I am Joseph!’ he said to his brothers. ‘Is my father still alive?’ But his brothers were speechless! They were stunned to realize that Joseph was standing there in front of them. ‘Please, come closer,’ he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, ‘I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this

place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And He is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt. ‘Now hurry back to my father and tell him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me master over all the land of Egypt. So come down to me immediately! You can live in the region of Goshen, where you can be near me with all your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and everything you own. I will take care of you there, for there are still five years of famine ahead of us. Otherwise you, your household, and all your animals will starve. Then Joseph added, ‘Look! You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that I really am Joseph’” (Genesis 45:1-12, NLT).

■ BURYING THE HURT

Prior to the sudden arrival of his brothers in Egypt, Joseph had seemingly coped with his wounded past by burying the hurt. From a fleeting look at the exterior of his life it could seem as though Joseph was free from the ache of his past betrayals, until you study the names he chose for his children. On closer examination it appears that all he had done was internalize the pain. Look at his firstborn son, Manasseh, whose name means, “I have forgotten my former pain” and “I have forgotten my father’s house.” And he named his second son Ephraim, which means, “God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.” In his mind Joseph had very successfully moved on with life. This could be the testimony of some of you today. You are now a Christian and believe you have moved on from what you

endured in the past. You may even be experiencing a level of fruitfulness in the so-called “land of your affliction.” It is one thing to move forward and embrace the future, but until you forgive those in your past you can never truly experience all God has planned for your life.

When you refuse to forgive other people, you starve the work of Christ, which is to forgive.

■ GOD’S WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS

God may allow people and circumstances that have wounded you to continually cross your path until you get to the place of forgiveness. This can result in great anguish of soul as past grievances surface. But the true act of forgiveness is to completely release the other person and treat them as though the offense had never occurred. It will cause you to look beyond their faults, and enable you to speak into their lives. It does not mean God gives you amnesia but He does remove the pain. This can be difficult, especially in a case like Joseph’s, for his brothers were still covering up their sin. He could have legitimately asked himself, “Why do I owe them anything? They are still not being truthful. There is no genuine humility being evidenced by them. They have not recognized me; I could walk away right now and leave them to their own miserable fate.”

But God’s plans are always so much greater than ours. Isaiah the prophet

said it this way, “*My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts, ...and My ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts*” (Isaiah 55:8–9, NLT).

■ STARVING THE WORK OF CHRIST

These hardened but hungry men were standing before Joseph who had the power to send them away empty handed, or forgive and feed them. Joseph said to them “*don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives*” (Genesis 45:5, NLT). This has always been the heart of God, to preserve life not destroy it.

God knew these brothers were unstable, self-willed and angry. He knew they were cowards and betrayers, but He was not finished with them yet. The bigger picture was that through Judah, one of Joseph's brothers, would come the Messiah, Jesus Christ. God Himself would move all heaven and earth to ensure the lineage of Christ would be protected. God would not let His purpose of ultimately blessing the entire world through His Son be stopped or aborted. He knew Joseph would obey Him and that is why He sent him to Egypt in the first place.

When you refuse to forgive other people, you starve the work of Christ, which is to forgive. They will remain hungry and impoverished, held captive to their sin. But when you release forgiveness you are freeing them to respond in like manner. You open their prison door and allow them to go free. Forgiveness is one of the keys of God's kingdom. The act of forgiveness is neither an option nor a feeling. It is a command. Matthew 5:23–24 says “*...if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly*

remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.” You do not wait until you feel good before you respond; you make the choice regardless of what your feelings are dictating.

Those whom God uses to provide for hurting and hungry people often travel a very painful road.

When Joseph decided to forgive, he was in fact choosing God's way. By his obedience he was feeding the work of God rather than starving it. It is an amazing thing. The moment he forgave, the plan of God continued to unfold. As failed as these men were, God had chosen them as the founding fathers of the nation of Israel. He had not abandoned them and He will not abandon you or those who selfishly betrayed you. This is the awesome mercy of God! When you finally understand it, the mercy of God will become the song of your life. “*It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the Lord, saying, For He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord*” (2 Chronicles 5:13).

■ PREPARATION TO BE A PROVISION FOR OTHERS

We do not know if Joseph had any inkling the day he forgave his brothers that the lineage of Christ was being preserved. We do not even know when Joseph fully understood that the things he suffered and went through were pre-ordained by God for his life. What we do understand is that it was a hard and harrowing journey over many years. Those whom God uses to provide for hurting and hungry people often travel a very painful road.

God used those tough experiences to prepare Joseph to be used in that exact time and place. Psalm 105:19 says, “*Until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him.*” God used Joseph's trials to bring him to a place where he could be a means of provision for his family. Our trials are used by God to bring us to a place where we know we stand only by His mercy. Joseph must have known this as well. Had God not done such a deep work in his heart, he would have been unable to forgive his brothers.

In the same way God has also been preparing you. Perhaps you received a promise He was going to use your life, and through you there was going to be provision made for others. Now that vision seems so far in your past and there has been so much pain and hurt inflicted throughout the years, you have lost hope of its fulfillment. You are happy just to survive in this world, and finally make it to heaven. But when God makes a promise to you, He does not back away from it because you go through hard times. He does not change His mind. The only thing that can take you away from the fulfillment of that promise is a failure to understand the methods of God's mercy, and continuing to live in unbelief. Whatever has happened in your life, God has allowed it for a

purpose. This is the key to freedom. It will release you from the prison of pain you may be in.

*If you make
the choice to
forgive, there
is not a
prison door
that can
hold you.*

■ MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE: FORGIVENESS

Joseph's choice to forgive was not an easy one to make. The scripture says he wept so hard that all the house of Pharaoh heard it. His anguish came from the very core of his being. His brothers were afraid when they saw him weeping because they knew what they had done to him many years before. At that moment they may have thought, "He is going to kill us; he is going to do with us what we did to him." Instead Joseph tells his brothers: "God sent me before you to preserve you in the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. It was not you that sent me here but God." Out of deep compassion, Joseph was now offering his brothers an olive branch of forgiveness and reconciliation. Through his suffering, the heart of God had been formed in Joseph. Love and mercy had been worked into him over time by the faithfulness of God.

As I have already said, forgiveness is never easy. One of the hardest things you will ever have to do is forgive the people who have wounded you

the most. But as you do, there will not be one obstruction the enemy has set before you that can stop you from fulfilling the will of God. He alone has placed this call on your life, and He alone will bring it to completion. As God was with Joseph, He is now with you and He will use your past hurts for His glory. Praise God!

Carter Conlon
©2009 Times Square Church

CARTER CONLON

Carter Conlon is senior pastor of Times Square Church, where he has been on the pastoral staff since 1994.

TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of "The Cross and the Switchblade." It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

Founding Pastor

David Wilkerson

Senior Pastor

Carter Conlon

Tel:

212-541-6300

Fax:

212-541-6415

Church Location:

237 West 51st Street
Between Broadway & 8th Avenue

Mailing Address:

1657 Broadway, 4th Floor
New York, NY 10019

e-mail:

info@timesquarechurch.org

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Church Service	
Thursday	7:00PM	Prayer Meeting	
Friday	7:00PM	Church Service	

This message is an edited version of "Starving the Work of Christ," a sermon given on May 10, 2009 in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website at tscnyc.org. You can also write to: Times Square Church, Sermon Ministry, 1657 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. You are welcome to make additional copies of this sermon for free distribution to friends. However, for all other forms of reproduction or electronic transmission existing copyright laws apply. This sermon cannot be posted on any website or webpage without written permission from Times Square Church. Unless otherwise noted, all scripturereferences are from the King James Version.