

LETTER FROM CARTER CONLON

Dear Friend,

Try to imagine a lighthouse being afraid because it becomes aware of an approaching storm.

"Oh, dear!" it says. "How will I ever make it through? Where will I find the strength to stand and somehow make a difference?"

You would stand in wonder and say, "Poor little lighthouse. Doesn't it realize that it was designed to withstand the coming storm and provide both comfort and direction to those looking for refuge? Does it not know that it has a strength and power source within it that makes it stand and shine in the storm?" As a matter of fact, it is built FOR the storm!

Dear friend, don't be afraid. Our hope is in God. *"And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"* (Romans 5:5).

We were designed for this time, so be encouraged! Jesus Christ will NEVER fail you.

Yours in Christ,



Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

BREAKING THE HEART OF OBEDIENCE

by Carter Conlon

We are all resistant to change, aren't we? Especially when it involves moving from the comfortable into what we perceive to be hardship or loss to ourselves, or even to someone we love. Have you ever found yourself wondering, "Why do things have to change? Why can't everything just stay the way it is?"

That was the cry of Peter in Matthew 17:4: *"Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."* Peter was on the top of a mountain, seeing the Son of God transfigured in the presence of Moses and Elijah. On the other side of the mountain was a man with a lunatic son, begging for mercy and deliverance. Honestly, given a choice between the two, which one would we naturally gravitate toward?

It would be wonderful if we could just live in a place of revelation. A place where the Scriptures are constantly unlocked and we understand the heart of God in a more profound way than ever before. We would not want things to change. This is the normal response of the human heart, for nothing in us naturally gravitates toward difficulty. In fact, in the western world today, we have even formed a Christian theological perspective that uses God to avoid every difficult place. It is an anemic Christianity that is depriving this world of the true influence of Christ. Now, contrast

this with Paul, who was not someone who avoided the difficult places, nor tried to shield others from it.

There is no great strength in my preaching that Christ can bring you through the storm, if I have never gone through the storm myself.

■ A LIVING EXAMPLE

"Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus... endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things" (2 Timothy 2:1-7). In this Scripture, Paul is exhorting young Timothy, reminding him that the journey is not going to be easy. He is essentially telling him, "Timothy, the husbandman that

labors must first be partaker. There is no great strength in my preaching that Christ can bring you through the storm, if I have never gone through the storm myself. If I am simply living in an ivory tower somewhere, where is my authority to tell you of the power and deliverance of Christ? If you are going to tell others that they can get through the difficult days that we all have to face, you are going to have to go through them yourself.”

Having chosen to follow Christ to the end, Paul was a living example for those who were to come. Think for a moment how hypocritical it would be for a pastor today to exhort others to follow Christ’s leading while he remains unwilling to do it himself. To stand in the pulpit and say, “Now, go find the will of God, and obey what God tells you to do,” while his heart is in another place. He builds a tabernacle and loves the revelation, the church, and the presence of God but God can no longer speak to him because of the condition of his heart.

■ PHILIP

There are many examples in the Bible of people who radically obeyed God even when it led them to difficult places that did not make sense.

We read in Acts 8, *“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city”* (Acts 8:5–8).

“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John; who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost... Then laid they their hands

on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:14–15, 17).

What an incredible story! Philip goes into a place where the people are demon possessed and there is very little knowledge of God. But suddenly miracles begin to abound, and people are getting healed and delivered. God’s kingdom is moving with such incredible power that word even gets to the original apostles. Philip is now in a ministry that has the attention of the established authority of the church of his time. The apostles send Peter and John to join Philip, they lay hands on people, and many receive the Holy Ghost. The Book of Joel is being fulfilled right before their eyes!

There is something being recorded in heaven about your life and mine—about the little acts of obedience that are so important in the sight of God.

If Philip were part of some ministry today, he likely would be known as “God’s man of the hour” in Samaria. He had a ministry that many preachers might aspire to—where God is doing something profound, miracles are happening every day, and the altars are filled with people coming to Christ and being touched by the Holy Spirit. What great thing could God have in store next?

“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went...” (Acts 8:26–27).

Arise and go to the desert? As Philip was packing, you can imagine people he knew rushing in and saying, “Isn’t it marvelous what God is doing? The altars are filled and the Word of God has come! Joy is spreading throughout the whole city and incredible things are happening! By the way, Philip, why are you packing up? Where are you going?” And he would have answered, “I am not quite sure—into the desert. I don’t know what’s there, I just know that God has spoken to my heart and I am supposed to go.”

Can you imagine the incredulity of the people as they watch Philip head out with his small entourage into the desert? It doesn’t make sense to the natural mind! But the interesting thing about this is that from the moment Philip obeys, the pen of God records his journey in intimate detail, while nothing more is spoken of the revival in Samaria. Isn’t that amazing? This seems to speak something of heaven, where God’s focus is not on the big players and the big ministries. Rather, there is something being recorded in heaven about your life and mine—about the little acts of obedience that are so important in the sight of God. Just as we see here in the Book of Acts that it is no longer about the miracles or the apostles, but about this man Philip who heads into the desert for the sake of one Ethiopian eunuch.

This eunuch happens to be in a chariot, reading from the Book of Isaiah, with a question in his heart, “Who is Isaiah writing about?” Philip joins the chariot, leads the man to Christ, and baptizes him. This is the first record in the New Testament of the Gospel of Jesus Christ going into the continent of Africa. And it was because of the obedience of Philip, a man who was willing to leave the multitudes and all the accolades to follow God into an unknown place and future. How precious is this radical

obedience in God's eyes that He chooses to record it and have people speak about it for years to come.

■ ISAIAH

Or consider the prophet Isaiah who writes, *"In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord"* (Isaiah 6:1). It was a difficult year during which hardship had entered the nation. However, God called somebody out of the crowd and gave him a revelation. Isaiah was now able to hear the voice of God asking, *"Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"* (Isaiah 6:8). It was not as if God had asked him directly; rather, Isaiah had begun to hear something in his heart.

Stepping out of the crowd of angelic beings, Isaiah said, "Here am I—as unworthy and untalented as I feel in the presence of a holy God, Lord, you have my life. Take me and use me for Your glory." The Lord essentially told Isaiah, "You are going to go down to a people who are not going to listen to you. You are going to preach to them until they are spiritually deaf, dumb and blind because they are a society under judgment. But I am going to give you the purest word and revelation that this particular generation has ever had. They will reject it. But for your efforts I will give you a tenth; one in ten people you speak to will turn to God."

Do you think Isaiah would have been wise to avoid it because it was a hard ministry, a difficult place? How poor would we be today if he had chosen not to go? We would not have the wonderful verse in the Book of Isaiah that says: *"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished..."* (Isaiah 40:1–2) Or the verse that tells us, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The*

mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

If you and I are not willing to go and be what Christ calls us to be in this generation, there will be many people around us who will be a lot poorer when this journey is over.

I dare say that if Isaiah had not accepted God's call, we wouldn't have that Word of God. Similarly, if you and I are not willing to go and be what Christ calls us to be in this generation, there will be many people around us who will be a lot poorer when this journey is over. Yes, we will make it to heaven, but we will have missed so much that could have been done, so much of God's heart that could have been conveyed. So much revelation of Christ that could have been realized by us and the people around us—if we had just been willing to make the journey and not avoid the hard places.

■ PAUL

Paul was undoubtedly a man of radical obedience in the hard places, and his journey is intimately recorded by the Holy Spirit. *"And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto*

us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." (Acts 21:8–11)

Agabus was not a false prophet. He was a well-meaning and compassionate man, who no doubt loved Paul dearly. But he saw hardship ahead for this beloved man of God.

Often when we think of people going into hard places, there is something in our heart that just wants to say, "Don't go there. Why suffer hardship? We are all going to heaven anyway, right?" Even Luke, who wrote the Book of Acts, includes himself among those who began pleading with Paul. *"And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done"* (Acts 21:12–14).

There will always be well-meaning people along the journey who speak out of the empathy of the human heart. Those who besought Paul not to go to Jerusalem did have the word from the Lord, but they did not have the complete picture. In Acts 21:13, Paul responds to them, *"What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?"* Paul is saying, "I have a heart to follow and obey God, and with all of your pleading, do you intend to break that heart in me?" Can you imagine if they had succeeded and their argument had prevailed over the leading of God in Paul's life? How spiritually poverty-stricken we would be today! We would not have the great revelations that the Holy

Spirit was able to give to Paul while he was in prison, while he was going through hardship and difficulty.

Sometimes the hardest place of all is right across the dinner table.

■ TRUE REVELATION

That is where revelation comes. You never get true revelation from somebody who just lies in a hammock all day. Revelation comes from those who walk the pathway of God. It was given to the apostle Paul during his trials; to the apostle John, not when he was leaning on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper, but when he was in prison on the Isle of Patmos for the sake of the testimony of Jesus Christ. Thank God for those who are willing to follow this journey.

Unfortunately, however, we live in a generation that tends to avoid the hard places. That is why we are seeing a Christianity with very little voice in much of the church today. I believe that in the coming days, what is purported to be God's thing of the hour is going to be blown like chaff to the wind, void of any real substance. But those who are willing to go in their own frailty, struggles, trials, nothingness—to let God be everything, solely for the honor of God and for the souls of men—will have a genuine cry in their heart, "Lord, here am I. Send me!"

■ THE HARDEST PLACE OF ALL

Now about the "hard places." It does not automatically mean leaving home to minister in some

remote tribe on the other side of the world. Sometimes the hardest place of all is right across the dinner table. Who will have the courage to humble himself and go to the other side of that table and reconcile wrong, whether he be the offender or the offended? Or the hardest place may be the apartment next door. Who will be willing to go across the hall and be kind to an irritating neighbor?

Beloved, you won't really know the miraculous until you go into the hard places—but the question is, Are you willing? Are you willing to be led into places your flesh does not want to go? Or into areas of ministry that you are not familiar with, that leave you declaring, "I have absolutely no qualification to do this?" Well, take courage, for the Lord will answer you just as He did Moses, who was called to a difficult place and initially responded by insisting on his inadequacy. "Who made your mouth?" the Lord asked Moses. "Who gave you life? Who created your voice? Who fashioned your heart? I am not looking for your abilities; I am looking for your willingness!"

You must resolve in your heart that you are not going to avoid the hard places. If you have the courage today to honestly say, as the old song goes, "Where He leads me I will follow. I'll go with Him, with Him, all the way," it will set a course for your life that will truly bring honor and glory to God!

Carter Conlon
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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.

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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	

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