

LETTER FROM CARTER CONLON

Dear friend,

Special greetings to you as we approach the holiday season. Although a rejoicing time, for some it is also a time when feelings of loneliness are intensified. However, it can be a time of incredible and hidden blessing for those who have the eyes to see it! Let me explain.

In the Christmas story in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, we see three types of potentially lonely people who ended up rejoicing. The shepherds—who must have felt outside of all the rushed, harried activity in Bethlehem. Feeling isolated out in the cold, an incredible revelation was given to them. What a song they sang as their hearts were filled with wonder at the Christ Child (Luke 2:8–20). Simeon, an elderly gentleman who also might have had reason to feel forgotten and alone, was shown a sight which filled his heart with peace (Luke 2:25–35). Anna, a lady who had suffered the loss of someone she loved, gave thanks at the hope that opened before her eyes (Luke 2:36–38).

Be encouraged! You are greatly loved of God. The Son whom they once held in their arms now eternally and lovingly holds you in His!

Merry Christmas!

Yours, in Christ,



Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

LONELINESS by Carter Conlon

"Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee. Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble; incline thine ear unto me: in the day when I call answer me speedily. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin. I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top" (Psalms 102:1–7).

We don't know what particular difficulty the writer was experiencing at the time he penned this psalm, but in it we find a common experience—a difficulty that we all face at some point in our lives: loneliness.

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greatest people
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Loneliness does not necessarily stem from the fact that someone is indeed alone. Millions of people live in the greater New York area, yet it can be one of the loneliest places on earth. Many people feel alone in their family setting or

workplace, perhaps rejected because they have come to Christ while others have not. Even church can be a lonely place for some—even though they stand on their feet and sing praise to the Lord, they know that once service is over, they will be alone once again. They will walk out the door and ask themselves, "Why can't I get rid of this deep sense of loneliness in my heart?"

If this sentiment is familiar to you, you are in good company. Even the psalmist said, *"I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top"* (Psalms 102:7). In other words, "I have the anointing of God. I know the purpose of life and why I am on the earth. Christ is everything to me and I live in a place where I have a higher view and see more than ordinary men, like a sparrow upon a housetop—yet I feel so alone."

■ LONELINESS IN THE SCRIPTURES

Some of the greatest people in scriptural history struggled with loneliness. David, for example, was anointed to be king of Israel, and the Spirit of God had come upon him. He had God-given talents and abilities and had experienced victories that perhaps no one in his generation had seen. However, at a point in his journey, he found himself in a cave saying, *"I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me:*

refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul” (Psalms 142:4). Nobody understood what he was going through, and in his opinion, nobody really cared to know. He could not find refuge in any of humanity around him.

Is it possible that loneliness has a purpose far deeper than we understand?

Or consider the apostle Paul, who likely had the greatest revelation of any writer in his generation. Listen to the words he wrote to Timothy in the last hours of his life: *“At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge”* (2 Timothy 4:16). How lonely Paul must have been at that moment in his life—especially after his whole journey and all he had given for the churches. Finally, when he was called to answer before the judicial system of his time, not a single person stood with him! How tempted Paul must have been to become overwhelmed when everyone forsook him. Likewise, how tempted we are to throw in the towel when we feel alone.

■ A DEEPER PURPOSE

Given the prevalence of loneliness throughout the Scriptures and in our own lives, we should consider an important question today: Is it possible that loneliness has a purpose far deeper than we understand? We live in a society that has adopted a theological perspective that pursues to escape all hardship and sorrow. But is it possible that we are constantly trying to escape something that God has intentionally allowed in our lives? Although the Bible promises a day in heaven when there is no sorrow, no sighing, no loneliness and no tears,

we are often like the prodigal son—we want our inheritance now. We want church to make us happy, with every message building up our self-image and allowing us to avoid all suffering. Tragically, this pursuit has left much of the Church ill-prepared for the days that we are all about to face.

Now think about this for a moment. There was no loneliness in the human race until sin separated man from God in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were not lonely—they had fellowship with God and with each other. But when mankind sinned, loneliness entered the hearts of the human race. And loneliness, though not a sin in itself, does lead many people to sin.

The Scriptures say we are enticed and drawn away by our own lusts—that is how sin gains a foundation in the human life. But for many people, it does not begin with lust—it begins with loneliness. People don’t just start browsing pornographic sites because they are filled with lust, nor do they get into bad relationships or substance addictions because they necessarily wanted to. In many cases they are simply lonely, looking for something to satisfy the aching in their heart. And when people come to Christ, they often get the impression that all of this will be gone—that they will never be lonely again. Therefore they begin to wonder, “Well, if I’m never supposed to be lonely again, why do I feel so alone? What’s wrong with me?”

Loneliness is in your heart for a reason—God put it there.

If you are lonely today and have given in to sin, or you are moving toward sin, you have made a wrong choice. You are becoming led by the lusts of your own fallen nature, and you will

find yourself in a worse situation than you have ever been in before.

I suggest to you that loneliness is in your heart for a reason—God put it there. After Cain sinned, he was sent as a vagabond in the land, yet God put a mark on him so that no man could hurt him. And when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, it seemed that loneliness was put into the human race by God Himself. He put it there because He wants you back to Himself again. You will never find anything to satisfy that ache in your heart. You were created by God, in His image, for fellowship with Him and ultimately for eternity with Him. Search for all the fame, wealth and popularity that you can—but that emptiness in your heart will never be satisfied until you are back in full relationship with God. Nevertheless, mankind incessantly circles this globe looking for some new relationship, some new thrill or activity to satisfy that ache in their heart put there by God Himself.

David said, *“I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul”* (Psalms 142:4). But then in verse 5 he said, *“I cried unto Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.”* David was lonely, but he said, “God, I know that You are the only one who can satisfy this ache in my heart. I know that I’ll never be complete until I am back in right relationship and full fellowship with You.”

The Lord wants us to come to understand that Jesus Christ is our only lasting strength and comfort in this world. Sometimes He causes everything to be stripped away until all that remains is a friend who sticks closer than a brother—until we finally stop looking to who is on the left and on the right. Thank God

for people—but it is only a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ that will truly satisfy.

Is it possible that loneliness is God's way of sharing His longing for people to return to Him?

■ SHARING GOD'S HEART

God uses loneliness to draw us to a place where we become fully satisfied in Him, but I believe we should consider another purpose, as well. Is it possible that loneliness in the human heart is God's way of sharing with us the longing in His heart for people to return to Him? You can waste time focusing on yourself, trying to get rid of that feeling or you can consider another possibility. Christ may be manifesting His heart in you saying, "I love you, I have embraced you, I have called you by My name. But just look away from yourself for a moment and see all the men and women around you, the teenagers on the street, that senior across the hall. I am lonely for them."

Paul said, "*If we suffer, we shall also reign with him*" (2 Timothy 2:12). Our loneliness is in measure a part of sharing in the sufferings of Christ, for Jesus Himself experienced loneliness. When people believed in His name simply because they saw His miracles, the Scriptures say that Jesus could not commit Himself to man, for He knew what was in man. At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus groaned and was troubled at the people's unbelief, and He wept. When He was with His own disciples explaining how He must go to Jerusalem to be crucified, none of them understood but instead tried to convince Him not to go to the cross.

When the people came to make Him a king, He walked away. It must have been lonely.

You see, the only real lasting fellowship Jesus had was with His Father and the Holy Spirit. That's why He said, "Father, if it be possible, take this cup from Me." There was nothing of this world that could satisfy Him. I believe even the thought of losing fellowship with the Father for a season was almost unbearable to Jesus. Hebrews 4:15 says, "*He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*" If He was not lonely, then this Scripture is not true. Jesus had to be tested in all points as we are, yet He did not sin. He did not try to escape the loneliness, but in spite of it allowed the hand of God to reach out through Him to others—to people whose pain would be eternal if He drew back.

If God's people spend their days drawing back from humanity, refusing to partake in what it really means to be the Church of Jesus Christ in this world, how many people are going to suffer for all eternity? I thank God Jesus didn't draw back and say, "Father, the only happiness I have is with You, and I am not willing to forsake it for anything." If that were the case, we would have no hope.

■ FOR THE JOY

"...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). It was for the joy—the joy of you and me being reconciled to God again. It was so that the longing and the loneliness in the heart of God would be satisfied. Did you know that God has a need that only you can meet? Have you ever considered that? Have you ever thought that God might be lonely? If that weren't the case, couldn't He have just written off all of humanity? God could have said, "Well, I tried and it didn't work. Let me create another world with some other people." But no! When God came down into the Garden of

Eden and yelled, "Adam!" He was like a father who had lost his child; like a husband who had lost his wife. There was a loneliness in the heart of God—a loneliness for every person throughout all time who would miss out on the great love and salvation of the Father.

And now Jesus commissions His Church, "As the Father has sent Me, now I send you into the world." So the question is, should we constantly try to escape all hardship? Should we live solely for our own happiness? Yes, happiness is a wonderful thing, and Christ had times of great joy in His own life. But as the Church of Jesus Christ, are we not still on a redemptive mission to bring people to the Savior? If we did not feel what is in the heart of God for humanity—if we could see a man crying on a bench and not be moved to speak to him—do we really share the heart of God?

If you and I lived on a mountaintop all the time, we would be obnoxious to this world. We would simply come down with our million-dollar smiles and our list of things for people to do to get right with God. There would be absolutely nothing in us that truly represented the Christ who went to a cross. Nothing of that passionate love of Jesus that caused lepers to crawl through a crowd, blind men to cry out on the side of the road, prostitutes to fall at His feet and wash them with their tears.

Yet in our day, in this American church age, can it be that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness has become our theology? Has society so infiltrated the church that we no longer resemble Christ but instead reject everything that could produce His character within us? How foolish it would be to try to throw away something in our lives that God is using to produce compassion in us! After all, lonely people are aware of other lonely people. Once someone has suffered and has had to be

comforted by God alone, it is only natural that they become filled with compassion and start reaching out to the needs of others.

For the joy set before us, we should be willing to endure the cross and despise its shame. It is for the joy of men, women and children being reconciled to God, the joy of knowing that the loneliness in our Father's heart is being satisfied.

Don't keep looking for that "perfect person" to come into your life and take away the loneliness.

■ PUT IT TO WORK

If you cannot put your finger on the reason for the loneliness in your life, it is likely that God, in His mercy, is sharing His heart with you. He said He would never fail you nor forsake you and He came to you when you reached out to Him. Yes, there is a day coming when there will be no more sorrow and no more tears, but until then, you are given the privilege of sharing the heart of Christ in this world. I am thankful that God doesn't just allow us to become aloof—distanced from the pain of humanity around us; distanced from the heart of God; singing songs but looking nothing like the Savior.

Don't keep looking for that "perfect person" to come into your life and take away the loneliness. True, he or she may dull it for a season, but

it will come back again. Instead, take that loneliness in your heart and channel it in the right direction, saying, "Lord, thank You for sharing Your heart with me, letting me know how You feel about people. As much as I may long for someone to come into my life, You long so much more for fallen men, women and children to return to You. Help me to focus on You and others rather than on myself."

As you submit to the Lord, He will give you compassion to move toward people who have that same cry of loneliness in their hearts. They don't have the answer—but you do! Allow God to use you to represent the heart of Christ in this generation!

Carter Conlon
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This newsletter is an edited version of "LONELINESS," a sermon given on August 22, 2010 in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website at tscnyc.org. 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 permission from Times Square Church. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the King James Version.

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	