

Dear Friend,

The book of Revelation holds startling insight into what might creep into the hearts of God's people and begin to sap their strength. Some of their theologies were just clearly wrong and in some cases had led to behaviors associated with spiritual decay, to the point that they were "spiritually dead while under the delusion of being alive" (see Revelation 3:1). The apostle Paul admonishes us to "*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves*" (2 Corinthians 13:5).

I am not afraid of God's reproof because His correction is evidence of His love. I have known people who have refused to be corrected and sad to say, they have never ended well. The apostle Paul clearly stated that it is possible to receive great revelation from God yet finish the race completely outside of the life and power they were promised (see 1 Corinthians 9:27).

I am passionate about these things because I want you to finish well. You and I are going to need great strength to stand in the coming days. Please receive this letter today as the hand of Jesus reaching out to you to give, restore and renew what only He can supply. Let's go on and finish the race together, embracing the truth that promises to set free all those who love it.

Yours, in Christ,

Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

I ONCE LONGED FOR NEW THINGS TO OBEY

by Carter Conlon

Recently I have been studying the lives of Bible characters who started out well yet finished poorly. I began in full-time ministry when I was 33 years old and I am now 57. It has been an incredible journey and I know that I have been supernaturally helped all along the way. However, I noticed in the Scriptures that many men who walked mightily with God seemed to falter in the latter part of their lives. I do not know about you, but I certainly do not want to finish poorly and look back with regret at the end of this journey.

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I believe that one way to avoid the pitfalls is to study the Scriptures with an open heart, for as Paul told Timothy, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction,*

for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16–17). The word perfect conveys the meaning of being brought to where God wants us to be—into His perfect will for each of our lives.

■ UZZIAH

Uzziah began his reign over Judah at the age of sixteen and ruled for fifty-two years, only to end up a leper. In his early days, he walked in the ways of God, "*...and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper*" (2 Chronicles 26:5). Uzziah was given a brilliant intellect and the ability to lead the people into a period of peace and advancement for the kingdom of God.

"*But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense*" (2 Chronicles 26:16). It is almost unthinkable that Uzziah would do such a thing. As king, he must have known that he had no authority to go into the temple and do what God reserved strictly for the priesthood. I personally do not know how to understand this other than to conclude that Uzziah must have lost the fear of God.

There is great danger in assuming that the Lord will no longer hold us accountable for what we do after having walked in the blessing

of God for many years, knowing nothing but His kindness and favor. Suddenly the things we ran from in our youth somehow seem right in our eyes. It is part of that fallen human nature that ultimately wants to be its own god and determine what is good and what is evil, even if it is completely contrary to God's Word. Perhaps this applies to you today—you have walked with God for years, experiencing His blessing and favor. Yet now you are worshiping in church while doing something that you clearly know is a violation of the Word of God. However, you mistakenly assume in your heart that you will not be held accountable.

You began in the Spirit with a wholehearted trust in God, but you have turned to the flesh, scheming and reasoning how to get through.

When Azariah and the other priests went in after Uzziah to withstand him, *“Then Uzziah was wrath, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wrath with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death...”* (2 Chronicles 26:19–21).

Imagine, fifty-two years of history wiped out by one foolish act! There should have been a glorious conclusion to Uzziah's life, but instead he ended up in a leper colony, literally put away by the hand of God. The leprosy on his forehead was a type, of the disease that had taken hold of his mind. When you have walked for a long time in the blessing of the Lord, beware! Beware of the casualness; beware of assuming that because God has blessed you for so long, you are now free to do what you once knew was sin and somehow not suffer any consequences.

■ ASA

Asa was another king of Judah who had a promising beginning. *“And Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God: For he took away the altars of the strange gods, and the high places, and brake down the images, and cut down the groves”* (2 Chronicles 14:2–3). Asa started out with a desire to do things God's way. He wholeheartedly served the Lord and led others into obedience, and the people built and prospered under his leadership. When the Ethiopian army came against the people of Judah with almost two-to-one odds, Asa went straight to prayer. *“Lord, it does not really matter how many of them there are or how weak we are. If You are in this, we are going to win the battle, and we are going to fight it for Your glory”* (see 2 Chronicles 14:11). So the Lord smote the Ethiopians.

Similarly, you have walked in impossible places. You have faced trials and times in your life when you knew you were powerless to get out of what held you captive. Yet you went into the prayer closet and cried, *“Lord, I know I am weak, but it doesn't matter because the power of Your Holy Spirit is on me. For the glory of Your name, take me out of this place and into where You want me to go!”* And God did

exactly that, opening the door of impossibility.

Later, during the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign, the northern kingdom of Israel came and built a fortified city against one of the areas of Judah. Despite witnessing the faithfulness of God over and over, suddenly we see a turn in Asa. He did go into the house of the Lord, but this time he did not go there to pray that God would once again glorify His name in an impossible situation. Rather, Asa went into the house of the Lord to take out the treasures so he could hire a foreign army to help fight against his enemy.

How dangerous it is when we become angry with spiritual authority!

Accepting Asa's offer of silver and gold, the Syrian king sent the captains of his armies to come to Judah's aid, causing the northern kingdom to retreat. *“Then Asa the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and the timber thereof, wherewith Baasha was building; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah”* (2 Chronicles 16:6). It all certainly looked successful—they won again and outsmarted the enemy. Asa may have even given some credit to God for this. The people of Judah took down the fortified city that was being built against them and used the stones to build additional places of habitation for the people of God in Judah. What possible problem could God have with this?

■ CUTTING OFF YOUR OWN STRENGTH

“And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on

the king of Syria, and not relied on the Lord thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand...Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars” (2 Chronicles 16:7, 9).

It all had an appearance of success, but the prophet of God said, “No! It is not success, it is foolishness. You began in the Spirit with a wholehearted trust in God, but you have turned to the flesh, scheming and reasoning how to get through. You have literally cut off the source of your own strength, and now the end result is that you are going to have trouble for the rest of your life.”

After so many years of walking with the Lord, Asa should have been open to correction. One would think that he would have fallen on his face before the Lord in repentance. But we read in verse 10, “*Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in a prison house.*” In other words, he locked away the voice of correction and now held the key to what could and could not be spoken.

That is exactly what the backslidden Christian will always do with the voice of God. He will come into church and conclude, “If the pastor speaks this, then I will let him out and listen. If he doesn’t, I will lock him up again. I will choose what is truth; I will choose when to bend my knee. No one has the right to tell me that what I am doing is wrong after all these years of walking with God!”

It is time to renew the altar.

How dangerous it is when we become angry with spiritual authority! Asa probably continued to smile and walk regally and royally, yet he was filled with rage. He could not escape the thought that he was rebuked, which is often the dilemma of those who have long walked with God.

■ DEAD INSIDE

“And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord but to the physicians” (2 Chronicles 16:12). Uzziah was diseased in his forehead because his mind had turned against the ways of God and here we see Asa diseased in his feet because he was pursuing a direction contrary to God’s desire. However, God’s incredible mercy is still evident. As the psalmist said, *“I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me”* (Psalms 119:75). God faithfully allowed this ailment in order to prompt Asa to turn back to Him.

If something has come into your life that you do not understand, I encourage you to stop for a moment. Consider that all things work together for good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose (see Romans 8:28). Could it be that God has allowed this circumstance in your life in order to stop you from making a foolish decision? If only Asa had turned to God and asked, “Lord, why are my feet diseased?” I am sure the Lord would have sent a prophet to him if he could not discern the answer for himself. He would have heard, “You are walking on the wrong path! You are walking in the flesh. You started in the Spirit but now you are walking in your own strength!”

“And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign. And they buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries’ art: and they made a very great burning for him” (2 Chronicles 16:13–14).

Here we see a picture of what happens when you lose dependence on the Holy Spirit. You look good, you smell sweet, but in reality you are very, very

dead. The Lord said to one of the churches in the book of Revelation, “...*Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead*” (Revelation 3:1). The word dead means “cut off from the enlivening influence of the Holy Spirit.” It is that simple. You are now walking in the flesh. You have learned how to sing the songs, clap your hands, shout at the right time, get to church on time—yet you are cut off from the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit. That is exactly how Asa ended up!

Get back to the place where you once longed for new things to obey.

■ RENEWING THE ALTAR

I believe at a significant point during Asa’s reign he could have avoided the disease in his feet just by staying on the right path. “*And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you. Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God...But when they in their trouble did turn unto the Lord God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them...And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the Lord, that was before the porch of the Lord”* (2 Chronicles 15:1–8).

God has been showing me one of the keys to not finishing poorly as Asa did. He renewed the altar

of the Lord! The Bible describes the altar as the place where we lay our lives down as a living sacrifice for the purposes of God. It is where we agree that we should not live according to our thoughts, our way, or our will, but the Lord's.

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It is time to renew the altar. It is time to get back to that place where you once shunned all evil and embraced good—that altar! Where your heart burned when you read the Word of God because you knew it was your life and your hope—that altar! Remember when your eyes would fill with tears at the mention of Jesus' name? Remember when you considered that being a servant was the highest calling? Get back! Get back to the place where you once longed for new things to obey—where your heart's cry was, "Lord, what would you have me do? I want to be at work in Your kingdom. It doesn't matter what it is—it doesn't have to be big—it can be a broom! Just let me glorify You!"

Notice also that before he renewed the altar of the Lord, Asa took courage and put away all the idols in the land. Today, if you have doubtful practices in your life, put them away. If you have embraced sin, erroneously believing that there will be no judgment for it, flee from it as quickly as you can. Walk in what

is right and do not ever lose the fear of God. Do not get to the place where you cannot be corrected—where you fail because of success; where you falter because there has been a history of faithfulness. God is wonderful, loving, just, and kind, but you cannot mock Him. You cannot play games with a holy God—there must be honesty in the heart.

Perhaps you have put away all the known idols in your life, yet you still find yourself with no passion for the things of God. If this is where you are today, your only hope is to come to God and say, "Oh, Lord, help me to renew the altar. Bring me back to the place where I counted it a privilege to lay down my life. Bring me back to the place where I once longed for new things to obey!" As you come to the Lord with an honest cry in your heart, He will answer you. He will see to it that you not only start well, but that you finish the race with your hands raised, with a crown of righteousness laid up for you, and your voice giving Him praise! Hallelujah!

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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