

Dear Friend,

I want to take this moment to wish you a very SPECIAL Christmas. It is a special time because you and I have the hope, strength and promise that is truly ours because of Jesus Christ. Not only did He come to us over two thousand years ago, but He still comes to us daily.

How wonderful to intimately know God and have the assurance that all our tomorrows are already in His hand! Yes, troubled times are here; however, think for a moment what incredible glories await us not too many days ahead.

I lift up my eyes to Jesus daily and thank Him for His life, His faithfulness and His promises for me and my family. These things are the joy of my heart. The book of Proverbs tells us that a MERRY HEART brings three blessings: a cheerful countenance (15:13), a continual feast (15:15) and a healing medicine (17:22).

In light of this, we truly wish you a very merry Christmas and a wonderful holiday season. He's coming soon!

Yours, in Christ,

Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

FINISH THE RACE WITH PRAYER

by Carter Conlon

"And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:22-24).

Considering these words of Jesus, one cannot help but wonder why it is so hard for many of God's people to pray. After all, if we truly believed these three verses of Scripture, wouldn't we be running into the prayer closet every day? Wouldn't prayer be the very essence of our life? Imagine having a friend with a billion dollars tell you, "Whenever you have a need, call me and it will be yours." Don't you think you would dial that number once in a while? Yet we have the very God of the universe saying, "I will move anything out of your way that hinders you. I will give you all you desire if you pray and believe."

So why is it so hard to pray?

I don't know about you, but I want to finish the race with prayer. I have seen the fruit of prayer in great measure over the years, but

I never want to get to the point of concluding that I have received enough. If God has more of His life for me, more ways that He can glorify Himself through me, I would be a fool to stop praying and start relying on something other than the words that come from the very heart of God.

So why is it so hard to pray? Obviously the devil is against prayer. All through the Scriptures we see what happened as a result of prayer—babies were conceived in barren wombs, the old were made strong, the miraculous abounded—so, of course, Satan is going to oppose us whenever we decide to pray. However, is it possible that there is something in our own hearts that hinders us as well?

■ OUR OWN HEARTS CONDEMN US

I believe that many people cannot pray because they constantly feel condemned. Imagine how difficult it would be to visit a friend who always magnified your faults and criticized your most sincere efforts. Although you come in happy, suddenly your spirits are dampened as this friend starts pointing out everything that you are not doing right.

Have you ever encountered something similar in the prayer closet? When I was a young Christian, I had a difficult time with this. If I prayed fifty-eight minutes, I would walk away and a

small voice would say, “What? Could you not pray with Me one hour?” If I prayed an hour and five minutes, the voice would say, “Is that all of the twenty-four hours of your day that you can spare for the Lord?”

Of course, this constant condemnation was from my own heart, although it is easy for us to mistakenly attribute such thoughts to God. Because of this, we enter the prayer closet in a manner much like Peter in Acts 10. The Scripture says that Peter went up on a rooftop, and as he began to pray, a sheet was let down by its four corners and contained all kinds of unclean beasts, birds and insects. This is exactly what our prayer life can be like—as we go into that secret place and get on our knees to pray, immediately a sheet comes down containing all our failings, faults, struggles and shortcomings.

Does this sound familiar? All the things you did wrong, all the places where you fell short as a Christian, all these little things come to your mind—as if that is all God remembers. However, notice that the Lord instructed Peter, “*Rise, Peter; kill, and eat*” (Acts 10:13). In other words, “Be nourished, Peter. Strengthen yourself during this time of revelation that I am giving to you.” Peter insisted, “No, I can’t do that because there is such uncleanness here.” In a similar way, many people today cannot grow in grace or lay hold of the promises of God because of a constant awareness of their uncleanness.

The Lord replied to Peter, “*What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common*” (Acts 10:15). When we go into the prayer closet, we must understand that we have been cleansed from all sin by the blood of Jesus Christ, and we are not to call ourselves unclean anymore. The Bible says that in Christ we are the righteousness of God. In other words, we are as

clean as God is—which would actually seem almost blasphemous if it were not written in the Scriptures.

Another reason we may have difficulty praying is because our desires are not in line with God’s desires for us.

I thank God for the covering of the blood of Jesus Christ. I thank God that I do not have to be strong to go into the prayer closet. As a matter of fact, the book of Hebrews tells me that it is in my time of need that I should go to the throne of God. It is when I need strength, direction, empowerment and help that I should go boldly to the throne of grace (see Hebrews 4:16). As His children, we have an open invitation to come into the presence of our heavenly Father.

Remember that the apostle Paul said, “*Be careful for nothing...*” In other words, do not be weighed down; do not let the enemy or your own heart condemn you. “*...but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God*” (Philippians 4:6). How can we come into the prayer closet with thanksgiving if we do not believe that we are already received of God? We must be convinced that it is God’s delight to manifest the life of His Son in us—to give us the things that we need to represent Him on the earth. That is the key to praying with thanksgiving.

■ ASKING AMISS

Another reason we may have difficulty praying is because our

desires are not in line with God’s desires for us. “*...Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts*” (James 4:2–3). You and I are left on the earth to make known the love of God—the love that sent His Son to a cross—and to glorify the Son. Christ bought the redemption, but we are to bring the reality of that redemption—the reality of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Yet when we forget this purpose, we ask amiss, and then we wonder why our prayers are not answered.

Think for a moment of what can result when we pray in line with God’s desires. When the 120 came out of the Upper Room in the Book of Acts, God had supplied them with the strength that they had prayed for—a supernatural strength that replaced mountains of fear and unbelief. There they were, 120 predominantly uneducated people, simply bursting into the marketplace among those who still had the blood of anger on their lips toward followers of Jesus Christ. Yet these disciples were filled with boldness and the presence of God.

We are afraid that God is going to ask something of us that we are not willing to give up.

The Greek word *megaleios* means they were speaking of the anticipated outworking of the inward life of God. They were speaking about what God was going to do, what He had given them, the faith that was alive in their hearts. The religious looked at this and essentially said, “Wow! There is

nothing of our religion that has ever given us anything like this! What must we do to be saved?"

Or consider the story in Genesis 24 where Abraham told his servant to go back to his country and find a bride for his son Isaac. This servant journeyed out to the land of Abraham's family and prayed, "Lord, if You have prospered my journey, and if You are going to be favorable to my master, lead me to the bride for his son" (see Genesis 24:12–14).

The Scripture says that before he was done speaking, Rebekah came out with her pitcher on her shoulder (Genesis 24:15) before he was done speaking! This servant had traveled a long distance, was in a very large place among a crowd of strangers, and did not even know where Abraham's family was. However, he prayed, and the miraculous began to unlock. I thank God that Abraham's servant was not a strategist. I thank God there were no phone books or cell phones available. In that generation he did what every man should do—he prayed! And when he prayed, God sovereignly began to answer that prayer. Rebekah was grafted into the lineage of Jesus Christ, and from this came Jacob, the patriarchs of Israel, and ultimately the Son of God Himself. What incredible results we see when we do not ask amiss!

■ FEAR OF WHAT GOD MAY ASK

Many times we cannot pray because we are unwilling to follow the pathway that may open up before us. We are afraid that God is going to ask something of us that we are not willing to give up.

In Acts 8, we read the account of a man named Philip who had a marvelous ministry in Samaria. Multitudes were being saved and healed and even the original apostles had taken notice of his ministry.

Yet, while in prayer, Philip was asked to leave what most would view as security and success—all to go to a barren place, into a situation he did not understand.

You and I tend to have a view of what our lives should be and what success is. Therefore we are not willing to go into the prayer closet lest God ask us to do something that is not on our agenda. That is why some churches today are filled with people who are simply using Jesus Christ to further their own agenda rather than the will of God.

*Whatever
the devil
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Philip chose to obey God and left Samaria for a desert place. It was in that desert that he experienced a miracle—a man of authority from Ethiopia being brought to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. After baptizing this Ethiopian eunuch, the Scripture says that Philip was translated by the Spirit of God. The Lord just took him and placed him in another city about thirty miles away! Obedience to leave what we view as success can actually be what opens to us the supernatural.

Of course, that does not mean that once we have a willingness to obey, we suddenly understand the full picture. God simply calls us to take that first step of obedience by faith. Philip's obedience brought the gospel—the first record we have of the gospel of Jesus Christ—into the northern parts of Africa. As we walk in obedience to the will of God and our desires are in line with His, we have the right to come into the prayer closet and say, "Lord, I need this" and suddenly we see the miraculous begin to unfold.

Later in the book of Acts we find the story of a disciple named Ananias. As Ananias was praying one day, God said to him, "There is a man called Saul of Tarsus staying down at his house on Straight Street. I want you to go down and lay hands on him. I am going to heal him and fill him with the Holy Ghost" (see Acts 9:11–12). Ananias essentially replied, "Lord, is this the same Saul that has done great harm to Your people in Jerusalem? I have heard that he has authority from the priests to put in prison all who call upon Your name. Now You are asking me to go lay hands on this man?"

Nevertheless, Ananias obeyed the word he received in prayer. As he prayed for Paul, scales fell from Paul's eyes and he soon began to go out and preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Christ. Thank God for Ananias' obedience! What if he had not obeyed God—if he had gone into the prayer closet and pushed out of his mind everything that was detrimental to his own safety and security?

I cannot get over the thought of the incredible, explosive power that is available if we have the courage to go to prayer and ask, "Lord, what would You have me to do?"—and then have a heart that is willing to obey whatever God asks of us.

■ SPEAK TO THE MOUNTAIN

Just preceding our opening Scripture (Mark 11:22), Jesus had cursed a fig tree that had an appearance of fruitfulness but was actually barren. He had come to what was a type of religion, a type of a relationship with God. He looked for life on it, but there was none. The fig tree represents everything within us that has no ability to let the power and strength of Jesus be manifested through us to others—everything in us that hinders, everything that does not represent the life of God, all that falls short of His glory. Remember, it was fig leaves that Adam and Eve used to cover themselves in the Garden of Eden. You and I have the power in Christ to curse this—to speak to this area in our own hearts and say, “No longer will you govern me.”

It is time to have faith in God. It is time to pray and expect the Lord to answer.

“For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith” (Mark 11:23). Jesus said we have the authority to speak not only to the fig tree but also to the mountain. The mountain is the soil—that which gives life and allows things that do not represent God to survive. We have the power to cast

into the sea everything that feeds this powerlessness and allows God look-alikes to flourish in our lives. We can cast them away and expect God to replace them with what we need to glorify Him on the earth.

In other words, whatever the devil has said you cannot do, whatever your own heart says will never change, whatever fear there is within you—that is the mountain. That is where you must stand and say, “I do not believe the lie—I believe what Jesus has spoken. Today I speak to this mountain, and I command it in the name of Jesus Christ to be cast away from me and planted in the midst of the sea!”

It is time to have faith in God. It is time to pray and expect the Lord to answer. Oh, what an hour to rise up and be the Church again! What an hour to go into the prayer closet with boldness despite all our weaknesses and come out with the strength of God. What an hour to have a clear mind, a clean heart, a fresh vision for the future, new strength that comes from God alone. What an hour to be equipped with the power of God!

Thank God that as we come to Him in faith, He will hear our prayers and give us strength. He will open our mouths to speak His Word. He will vanquish our enemies, endow us with giftings that we do not naturally have and enable us to face the days that we are living in now. There is going to be a new song in our hearts, and we are going to finish the race with prayer!

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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