

Dear Friend,

I hope this letter comes at a time when your heart is open to being encouraged. In John 8:32, Jesus made this incredible statement: *"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* As believers, we come to understand that through the depth of these words, God will lead us to places where they become our personal reality.

Much of what we go through may initially be hard to understand. Yet, Psalm 37:37 tells us that the mark of the perfect man—the one in whom the Word of God has done its work—is peace. This peace is a calmness and assurance of the faithfulness of God in spite of our present storm.

There is wonderful strength in letting God's truth be formed in us. An example of this is in the truth you are about to read.

Be encouraged! Jesus is with you and He will never fail you.

Yours, in Christ,

Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

THE DAY THAT JESUS LEFT HIS FRIENDS

by Carter Conlon

I am so thankful for friends and fellowship in the body of Jesus Christ. It is wonderful to be able to encourage one another, to spur each other on to continue in the faith, to have a word that might help lift another's burden. The Bible clearly exhorts us not to forsake assembling together—in even greater measure as we see the Lord's return drawing nearer (see Hebrews 10:25). Yes, I have enjoyed many marvelous moments of friendship over the years. Nevertheless, I also have found that God often calls me to a place where I must journey alone.

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives" (Matthew 26:26–30).

Here we see fellowship around a table, with Jesus openly declaring His intent to obey the calling of His Father, regardless of the personal cost. He was essentially telling them, "As you see this bread broken, I am going to be broken

for you. Not only for you, but for all people who will turn to God through Me. Just as you see this juice being poured out, My blood is going to be spilled upon the ground for the redemption of all humanity."

I am sure many of us have openly declared our desire to obey God to the fullest. We have gone to an altar and prayed, "Oh, God, take me the full journey; use my life for Your glory. Make me into what You want me to be!"

During our journey, there will be places where God calls us to go individually.

Six months after praying a prayer like that, you may have found yourself screaming, "Lord, what are you doing to me?" And the Lord answers, "Well, I am just answering your prayer. You said you wanted to take up your cross and follow Me, so that is what you are doing!" It is not merely a theological cross that you take up, of course. There must be a practical inward and outward working of it.

■ UNFULFILLED PROMISES

"Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this

night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended...Likewise also said all the disciples” (Matthew 26:31–35).

We have all had friends say, “I am in this with you; we are going over the finish line together!” I cannot help but wonder if, in this context, Jesus was tempted to lean on His friends for this final and most pivotal part of His earthly journey. Hebrews 4:15 tells us Jesus fully understands and feels our struggles and weaknesses, for He *“was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”* The God side of Jesus Christ could not be tempted, but the man side of Him could be.

“Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy” (Matthew 26:36–37). Jesus was approaching that final moment when He would give His life for all the sins of humanity. Into this place of prayer He chose to take Peter, James and John—His closest friends on earth, His inner circle. They had seen His transformation; they had been with Him when He raised the dead—they knew who He was.

As Jesus took them into the garden of Gethsemane with Him, He shared with them the agony of His heart. *“...My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me”* (Matthew 26:38). In other words, “I am going into a time of intense agony, and I am asking you to be with Me. I am asking for your support, your prayer, your help. You promised Me that you would not deny

Me. You promised Me that you would stand with Me, even unto death. You promised Me that no matter how difficult it got, you would not walk away from Me. Now I am asking you to stay here with Me.”

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Jesus went a little farther beyond them into the garden and began to pray, His sweat dripping as blood because of the agony that lay ahead. I find it very interesting because He then got up and went back to His inner circle. Although Jesus was seeking strength from His Father—the only source of true strength—He also went back to His disciples. When He found them asleep, He said to Peter, *“...What, could ye not watch with me one hour?”* (Matthew 26:40). Do you think Jesus could have been tempted to be disillusioned, perhaps even bitter, with His friends? He could have been tempted to question Peter, James and John, “After pouring My heart and life into you for over three years, could you not have given Me one hour when I needed you most?”

During our journey, there will be places where God calls us to go individually. However, it is during those times that we will often be

faced with the temptation to lean on our friends. While we theologically know that our only source of strength is God, we all have the human tendency to come back and lean on people. You and I run into a crisis and go into the prayer closet—yet we are not even halfway through our prayers when suddenly we are on the telephone calling somebody seeking counsel. We are looking for strength from God, but we also are looking to people for what only God can give. And there is a temptation in the heart to get bitter when we are looking in a dual place.

Remember that the Bible says, *“...Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm...”* (Jeremiah 17:5). Flesh will always fail. As wonderful as fellowship is, as wonderful as the promises that we have made to each other are, we simply are not capable of keeping those promises, for we are all built of the same frail cloth. The disciples were not at a place in their spiritual journey where they could share in or understand what Jesus was asking them to do.

“He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy” (Matthew 26:42–43). I see this as a last backward glance for the help of man. After all, why did Jesus come back a second time instead of just staying there to pray? It is as if He simply was looking for help, for companionship, for strength—only to find His disciples asleep.

It is only my opinion, but I believe that the Father in His mercy put them to sleep, for it was the strength of God alone that could take Jesus on this last and final step of His journey. There are times in our lives when God calls each child

of His into his or her own Gethsemane, and nobody else can understand it; nobody else can help them there. People may offer words of encouragement and promise, but ultimately they will end up asleep because it is not their moment.

There simply comes a point when you have to leave your friends.

■ NECESSARY WOUNDS

A specific tree in Israel normally yields large amounts of fruit, yet sometimes it starts bearing less than it should. In our natural compassion we would start reading manuals about how to encourage this tree, how to go around the root system, how to give it certain types of fertilizer to help it grow and bear more fruit. Yet the true keeper of the vineyard comes with a huge machete in his hand and literally hacks the tree full swing on the side, causing the sap within to bleed out. At that point the tree has only two choices—it either goes down deep to find water or it dies. Most of the trees go down deep and eventually the wound heals because it finds itself in a root system drawing water from depths that ordinary trees cannot reach.

Similarly, if you desire to walk as Jesus did, you will not escape the classroom of being wounded. People you trusted will fall short. Proverbs 27:6 says, *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend...”* Faithful. Did you know that God will even assign people to wound you—to fail you, to fall short of what you think friendship should be—in order to get your roots to go down deeper? Are you convinced that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called

according to His purpose? (See Romans 8:28.) We tend to spend so much time rehearsing wounds of the past that we fail to understand that God is the author of these things in order that we might bear much fruit in His kingdom.

“And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words” (Matthew 26:44). Jesus left them! There simply comes a point when you have to leave your friends. You must leave this reliance on flesh and move into that place where the Holy Spirit is calling you—a place deeper and farther than natural man can go. It might even be a small journey from where you are today—just a small step. It does not mean that you leave your friends behind. It means that you come back and are more committed to them than ever.

How many get saved, but fail right at the finish line because they cannot accept that this kingdom is all about being given for other people?

■ RETURNING IN POWER

The last part of the journey is where you and I are called to be fully given for all people in spite of their response to us. Nobody but God can give us the strength to go to that place—to the place where we come back. The Scripture says that Jesus left the disciples, and when He later returned, He said

to them, *“...Sleep on now...”* (Matthew 26:45). Jesus was not looking for strength *from* them, but instead He returned with the strength of God in Himself *for* them.

Note that when Jesus came back this third time, He was not bitter or indifferent. In fact, the fellowship was about to become sweeter. Genuinely sweet fellowship in the church of Jesus Christ is when I am not looking for anything from you, nor are you looking for anything from me. Instead, we are both given for each other. That is the sweetest fellowship there is.

Jesus Himself said, “No one that the Father has given me is going to perish except the son of perdition” (see John 17:12). Chosen to wound Him; chosen to betray Him—that was all part of the plan of God. Yet how many people fail at this point? How many get saved, walk with God, attend Bible studies, embrace the Scriptures, sing the hymns of Zion, but fail right at the finish line because they cannot accept that this kingdom is all about being given for other people? It is all about a God who is good to the unthankful and the unholy; who sends rain on the just and on the unjust. We are called to represent Him in the earth, yet how can we do so if we do not carry the heart of God within us? How will we ever make a difference unless we have been empowered by God Himself to come back and, whether or not it is ever reciprocated, be given for all people?

Remember that Jesus had to endure the betrayal of all His disciples, who fled in fearfulness. Yet God ultimately brought Him to a point where He could come back and enter an upper room full of those who had denied Him and simply say, *“...Peace be unto you”* (John 20:19). Jesus then breathed on His disciples, saying, *“...Receive ye the Holy Ghost”* (John 20:22),

and sent them out as the Father had sent Him.

And what do they end up doing? They go back to their fishing! Nevertheless, Jesus returned to them and was on the shore baking bread and cooking fish—calling them in, talking about love. He had come to a place where He was fully given for His friends.

It is time for us to leave behind those moments when we were failed by the people we needed.

■ LETTING GO OF GRIEVANCES

It is time for us to leave behind those moments when we were failed by the people we needed. Perhaps for you it was parents in your youth, a marriage partner who walked out, or church leaders who disappointed you. Whatever the circumstance, you must get beyond the grievances of man—beyond harboring and nurturing in your mind the failures of humanity.

Over the years I have seen that many people never get beyond that point. They sit in church, but when you dig down deep, it becomes apparent that they still have an inner grievance against people, particularly those they once considered to be their friends in church. They can still sing the songs, still clap their hands and say, “Praise the Lord”—as long as the one who betrayed them stays

about five feet away. Their fellowship becomes selective, and they start seeking out people they believe will not hurt them again. Unfortunately, they do not realize how far short of the glory of God they have fallen.

When we choose to press in to find the strength that only God can give, we will no longer have our list of grievances. Instead, we will have a heart that says, “Slap my face if you will, but by the power of God I shall be given for all people. Put me in jail, laugh me out of the workplace, but God has given me the strength to be given for others.”

There is a time when we must leave our friends for just a moment and find strength that can come only from God. God forbid that in this hour you and I should stop just near the end of the journey—that short distance of going from leaning on people to coming back in the power of God.

When we return in the power of God, we do not come back aloof or with resentment toward others. We come back ready to be given for all men, even our enemies. We are no longer looking to draw from others, and therefore we return to experience a fellowship that is much deeper and sweeter—the true fellowship of Christ!

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.

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 newsletter is an edited version of “THE DAY THAT JESUS LEFT HIS FRIENDS” a sermon given on July 3, 2011 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.