

Dear Friend,

I am writing to you at the beginning of a three-day fast here at Times Square Church. We are praying about the future of this country. Perhaps never before in history have the prayers of God's people been more crucial. We all sense the rapid winding down of the remaining time before Jesus returns for His Church.

I urge you to rediscover with us our identity in Christ. To whom else did Jesus ever say, "Whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive?" The truth is, you and I are the ones He called to be the testimony of His forgiveness and power on this earth! I think that many of God's people suffer from a form of spiritual amnesia. We quite simply have forgotten who we are and how much power for good we possess. We must remember that our prayers have the power to move the hand of God!

I firmly believe that we are living in a moment where Christ is calling out to us to call out to Him. We now have a window of opportunity to see many rescued from darkness and our society remain a force for good in the coming season. Let's not miss this moment! We have a chance to lay hold of God's mercy, so let's go in to His presence with the confidence that He has invited us there to pray.

Yours, in Christ,
Pastor Carter Conlon

WHEN I DON'T UNDERSTAND

by Carter Conlon

There are moments in every Christian's life when it seems the only conclusion we can come to is, "I don't understand." We do not understand the way God is leading us; we do not understand the work He is doing in our lives. Soon one may even begin to wonder, "Have I missed God? Did I take a wrong turn somewhere along this journey? Why does the Lord seem so distant?"

Even King David expressed such sentiments. "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?*" (Psalm 22:1). Of course, this is the psalm that Jesus Christ quoted on the cross when He cried, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" (Matthew 27:46).

Obviously the hand of God was on David as he penned those words which described Christ's sufferings. But we can draw the inference that David must have been experiencing those emotions in his own life as well. After having begun his life with such promise—the presence of God upon him in an unprecedented way since the time of his youth—he had now come to a point where he felt forsaken. "*O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent*" (Psalm 22:2). In other words, "I am seeking You night and day. I am crying out to You, but why are You not hearing me?"

I know the feeling. There was a season when I became very, very sick. After moving to the United States in 1994, I found myself developing a cough the following year, which continued to grow worse. It turned out that our home in New Jersey contained toxic mold and by the time it was discovered, the entire attic was black, with no visible wood!

"What happened to all the promises You made to me? Will they ever be fulfilled?"

One of the best doctors in the country diagnosed me with bronchial asthma and then told me my bronchial tubes were so damaged that I most likely would never recover. I remember having to breathe into an oxygen mask every morning for about fifteen minutes to try to get rid of the terrible headaches that are characteristic of toxic mold poisoning. Even walking down the street proved to be a challenge, as I would often feel like I was about to pass out. Needless to say, it was a time of despair—a time when many questions came into my heart.

■ DAVID'S "WHY?"

I imagine that it was incredibly difficult for King David to understand his season of trial, as well, especially when for so long

he had lived a life governed and sustained by the promises of God. *“You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s womb You have been My God”* (Psalm 22:9–10). He was raised in the ways of the Lord and learned to trust Him early. He trusted God for the power to fight a lion and a bear as a young teenager. And after the prophet Samuel poured a flask of oil upon his head, prophesying what God was going to do in and through his life, David went on to defeat a giant called Goliath. David won many other incredible victories as well—ones that he knew could have come only by the help of God.

If Elijah was going to represent God before the people, he had to be a partaker of their sufferings.

Yet now David goes on to say, *“Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; and there is none to help”* (Psalm 22:11). There is no historical data that tells us exactly when he wrote this psalm. Perhaps it was when he was being pursued by Saul—a king who lost the Spirit of God and was envious of him. Regardless of the situation, David knew in his heart that his own natural strength would not be sufficient to meet his need. Yet God was seemingly distant.

David could have easily asked the questions that you and I ask. *“What happened to all the promises You made to me? Will they ever be fulfilled? Why do I have to go through all this?”*

■ LESSONS IN THE WILDERNESS

The prophet Elijah was another who had seasons when he did not understand what God was doing. He was a man committed to seeing the Lord glorified, and he had prayed for the spiritual restoration of a nation that he loved. God could have simply come down in the fullness of His glory, and the whole nation would have bent its knee. Yet, how did God respond to Elijah’s prayer? He sent a drought (see 1 Kings 17:1)!

God chose to do it this way in order to cause the people to begin to consider their ways. Meanwhile, the Lord’s instructions to Elijah were: *“Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there”* (1 Kings 17:3–4). Elijah could have asked, *“What is going on, Lord? I know who You are; I know the power that You have. So why this long delay in answering my prayer? And why do I have to sit beside this brook, waiting for ravens to come drop some meat into my lap every day?”*

God knows what you and I are about to face, and He knows what it will take to get us through.

Of course, you and I can understand in hindsight why God did it this way. First of all, if Elijah was going to represent God before the people, he had to be a partaker of their sufferings. Second, the Lord was teaching Elijah that He could

provide in the wilderness. You see, God knew that Elijah would soon have to pass through a wasteland of his own feelings of failure and depression.

Not far down the road, following a great victory, Elijah would end up fleeing from a queen named Jezebel. Running into the wilderness, he would become so overwhelmed by a sense of failure that he would ask God to take His life. And so this was an important time of preparation for Elijah—a time of instilling deep within his heart the assurance that no matter what may come, God would never fail or forsake him. Likewise, God knows what you and I are about to face in the future, and He knows what it will take to get us through. Therefore, as a faithful Father, He starts to prepare us beforehand.

We must have the eyes to see that God can take nothing and make something out of it.

The lesson did not stop there for Elijah. The brook dried up and God sent Elijah to a poor widow. Why a poor widow? Why not a rich one? By her own testimony, this widow was going out to gather sticks to make a fire so that she could make cakes for herself and her son before they died.

Yet God sent Elijah to this home and said, *“I have commanded a widow to feed you and look after you”* (see 1 Kings 17:9). I believe Elijah needed to see what God could do with just a little bit of faith and a little bit of resource. God was about to use him to

train others to believe for the next generation!

Similarly, when revival comes and we experience a spiritual awakening in America, people are going to flock to the house of God with seemingly little faith and little resource. That is why, having experienced it ourselves, we must have the eyes to see that God can take nothing and make something out of it. He does not need our talent; He does not need our resources. He simply needs somebody willing to say, “God, would You take my life and use it for Your glory?”

■ IS THIS REALLY NECESSARY?

Returning to our opening psalm, we see David continue to say, *“You have answered Me. I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when he cried to Him, He heard”* (Psalm 22:21–24).

David realized that no matter what it may have felt like initially, he had not been forsaken by God. You, too, can be assured that when you cried out to God—when you offered your life to be used for His glory—He heard you! However, the reason we get into trouble in our understanding of God is because when we pray, we immediately formulate a picture in our minds as to what the answer is going to look like. And when it does not pan out exactly that way, we end up frustrated and confused.

Back in those days when I was very sick, I remember praying, “Lord, I cried out to You and asked You to use my life for Your glory. I came to New York City by Your will, not

by my own. I stood by a man of God, and I fought his enemies as if they were my own. It was a difficult time. And now I can barely breathe!” One particular night, I was walking by a restaurant called Beef Steak Charlie’s that used to be on Eighth Avenue in Manhattan. It was one of those times when I was seeing black dots around me because I was on the verge of passing out. I suddenly cried out loud, “Is this really necessary?”

It was not an accusation against God. Nevertheless, I could not help but wonder: “Hasn’t it been hard enough here? Lord, You sent me to help this man of God, and I gave everything I had for this battle to the point of exhaustion. Now I am so sick that I can hardly breathe. Is this really, really necessary?”

I was shocked at the Lord’s reply: “Yes, it is very necessary!”

“I had to take away your strength in order to teach you how to be dependent on Me.”

Immediately, passages from Psalm 119 came into my mind. *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word”* (v. 67). *“In faithfulness You have afflicted me”* (v. 75). God was speaking to my heart, “It is My faithfulness that has allowed this in your life. You are not being overpowered by the devil; this is not even the devil attacking you. I have allowed this to come into your life for a specific reason. I had to take away your strength in order to teach you how to be dependent on Me. I don’t want your opinions; I don’t want your ideas. I want you to obey Me. I want you to learn how to follow Me when I speak. I have afflicted

you in faithfulness; I am preparing you for what is to come.”

How faithful God is! I didn’t know at that time that I would soon be called to be senior pastor of Times Square Church! It had not even entered my thinking. But God knew, and He knew what He needed to do in order to prepare me.

I have learned that I do not always have to know the reason for what I am going through.

■ HIS WAYS ARE HIGHER

If you find yourself today in the middle of a trial that has left you confused and in despair, you can take comfort in the fact that there is a purpose behind it. You may not understand it now, but it is just as the Lord said to the prophet Isaiah: *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,”* says the Lord. *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isaiah 55:8–9). God does things His way. We may question why and sometimes we will get the answer. But there are other times when we will not. It all boils down to trust!

I have learned that I do not always have to know the reason for what I am going through. All I need to know is that God will be faithful. He will be faithful to me, and He will be faithful to you! He will be faithful to your marriage, faithful to your children, faithful to keep your mind! The devil is not going to gain advantage over you, for Jesus Christ has interwoven the honor of His Name in keeping you.

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constantly asking
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Although it will not be easy to walk through these seasons of trial, just remember that God is planting within you what you will need to get through the days ahead. He is depositing His strength in you. So instead of constantly asking why, learn to say, “God, I choose to trust You today. I do not need any other answer; the answer is that You are faithful. You will never be anything but faithful to me. You will not forsake me!”

I love what the passage in Isaiah goes on to say: *“For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands”* (Isaiah 55:12). The mountains’ breaking forth into singing represents every obstacle being commanded to worship God. *“Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree”* (Isaiah 55:13). In other words, instead of all that appears to be barren and hopeless, all that seems to cause pain, there is going to be fruitfulness in your life. *“And it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off”* (Isaiah 55:13).

God was saying through Isaiah, “Yes, you are going to go through times of pain and barrenness. But I am going to bring you out, and you will know Me in such an intimate way that it will seem as if all of nature is clapping her hands at how faithful I have been! I am going to take you in your nothingness and confusion, and do such a powerful work in you that it will bring glory to My name!” 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	Prayer Service	
Friday	7:00PM	The Gate*	

*Youth and Young Adult Service

Live Webcast:

All our Sunday and Tuesday services can be watched live and replayed for seven days on our website.

tsc.nyc

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