

Dear Friend,

I hope this letter finds you well and still optimistic about God's ability to use you for much good. I just returned from visiting our Bible school, Summit International School of Ministry in Pennsylvania (Summitpa.org). This year, we have students from five different continents attending! It is amazing to see the spiritual hunger in so many young lives, and the presence of God is literally tangible there.

We have kept Summit affordable (with tuition, including room and board, at the \$7,000 level) so that every young person who feels God's call might have a chance for quality, degree-earning training. Yet even at the incredibly modest tuition, many students still need to be subsidized.

As I said at last year's graduation, "It is indeed a wise generation that invests in light in a time of darkness." If you are considering a gift to this ministry, I would appreciate your helping our school. Of course, we could increase the tuition to meet our needs, but the price we would have to pay in the loss of training for some of these young lives is too high to consider.

"For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack..." (2 Corinthians 8: 13–14).

Yours, in Christ,

Pastor Carter Conlon

WHEN CHRISTIANS MAKE MISTAKES

by Carter Conlon

"So Peter went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). In this scene just before Jesus' crucifixion, we see Peter weeping inconsolably, stunned by his own sense of failure. After all, he was the one who seemingly had the most passion of those who were following Christ. He was the disciple who said to Jesus, "Others may run from You, but I will not." At another time, he declared, "I am willing not just to live with You but to die for You and with You in Jerusalem!" (see Matthew 26:35). However, only a very short time later Peter denied he even knew Christ, swearing with an oath to this effect.

I feel in my spirit that a lot of bitter weeping is going on in the Body of Jesus Christ today—that many disappointed, disillusioned people feel they have somehow failed God. They remember the days when they loved to pray—when they could not wait to tell people about Jesus. But something happened along the way. They feel as if they have made a mistake of some sort, and now they don't know if their relationship with God can ever be as it once was.

If you are among those who have been feeling this way, I hope you will be encouraged to remember that Christians do make mistakes. In fact, let's take a look at a few of the common mistakes I believe every Christian is prone to making.

■ RELYING ON HUMAN REASONING

The first mistake that Christians often make is substituting human reasoning for divine counsel. The Scripture tells us in the book of Acts: "All the early disciples continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (see Acts 1:14). Now, when you and I pray, ideas will come into our heart. However, we must remember that they are not always from God, even though we are praying. Our fallen nature desires to be as God is, and every once in a while it will still whisper something. It wants to declare something to be a good idea which, even though it is good, might not be God's idea for the moment.

Have you ever felt you had a direct word from the Lord and set out to do it, only to have it all seem to blow up in your face?

The next verse goes on to tell us that Peter stood up and recounted how Judas betrayed the Son of God, bought a field with the reward of his betrayal, and then fell to his own death (1:15–19). Peter then quoted a Scripture, saying,

“Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it’ and, ‘Let another take his office’” (Acts 1:20).

Peter had an idea in his heart. Even though he had wept bitterly, even though he had made tremendous mistakes, he still had a strong will.

“Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord, Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.’ And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, ‘You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen’” (Acts 1:21–24).

This is only conjecture, but I believe when God speaks, He does not present us two choices. When we end up with two choices, many times they are good ideas that have come from the heart of man. I have been in enough board meetings to have seen this happen over and over again.

So how did they figure out who was going to be the twelfth apostle? They cast lots! The lot fell upon Matthias, so he was numbered with the eleven apostles. Yet you never hear of him again!

It is difficult for Christians to admit that they have become bitter against God.

You see, somebody did have to take that twelfth place, but they needed to learn to wait on God rather than substituting human

reasoning for divine counsel. When human reasoning gets into the Church of Jesus Christ, we are essentially trying to promote a supernatural kingdom in a natural way, and the two simply do not go together. The man God had chosen to be the twelfth apostle was not saved yet—his name was Saul of Tarsus. When you read Paul’s letters, they say, “Paul, chosen by God, called to be an apostle” (see 1 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1). Paul knew that he was called, and he was actually the one chosen by God to become the greatest apostle of all times.

■ HARBORING BITTERNESS AGAINST GOD

Allowing discouragement and bitterness against God to enter the heart when a plan does not move forward as expected is a second common mistake of Christians. Consider Peter at the Last Supper. Zealous to serve God with all his heart, he suddenly heard Jesus say, “Whoever does not have a sword, get one now. For it is written, he was numbered against the transgressors” (see Luke 22:36–37). So Peter got his sword, stuck it in his belt, and promised to fight to the end for this Man he believed to be the Son of God.

Later in the Garden of Gethsemane when Judas and the band of zealots came to take Christ captive, Peter drew his sword and took a swipe at the high priest, cutting off his ear (see Matthew 26:51). Now Peter was serving God the way he felt he has been instructed to. But Jesus reached to the ground, picked up the ear, put it back on his head, and then turned to Peter and said, “Put your sword away” (see Matthew 26:52). Imagine how Peter must have felt as he stood there. “I trusted You; I have sincerely followed You.

But now You have left me standing here, looking like a fool!”

Have you ever felt you had a direct word from the Lord and set out to do it, only to have it all seem to blow up in your face? I am sure we have all had those moments when we end up thinking, as Peter did, “I don’t know You! I don’t even know if You know what You are doing. You give all these contrary instructions. If You didn’t want me to use the sword, why did You tell me to get the sword in the first place?”

Of course, there might be something a little deeper in the instruction of God. We often assume that we know exactly what He means when He sends us out to do something. Then when it does not work out as we thought, we become discouraged and even bitter.

Although it may feel as if God does not hear our cries, we must not forget that God’s ways are not our ways; His thoughts are not our thoughts.

It is difficult for Christians to admit that they have become bitter against God. A famous evangelist, in his eighties at the time, told me about his grandchild who contracted cancer. He prayed and fasted and believed this little three-year-old girl was going to be healed, but she died. And as a result, he became very bitter toward God. Something in the heart says, “Lord, I have served You all these years. I have honored Your Son and Your family; I have fed Your sheep. All I am asking

You for is this one little life. Will You not spare it?" After she died, he and I were sitting in a restaurant together, and he said, "Pastor, the only reason I did not turn from God when my granddaughter died is that I had come too far to turn back." Nevertheless, he was angry with God but at least he had the courage to admit it.

Watch what happens when you start extending mercy to other people.

Even David the psalmist once said, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me? And from the words of My groaning. O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent"* (Psalm 22:1–2). In effect, David was saying, "I am doing my part. Why are You not doing Yours? I am praying, I am crying out, I am seeking justice and righteousness. God, I know You have the power to make a difference, but why are You silent in the midst of my prayer?" Although it may feel as if God does not hear our cries, we must not forget that God's ways are not our ways; His thoughts are not our thoughts. He has never left us nor forsaken us. And so we must carefully guard our hearts against bitterness.

■ GIVING UP ON PEOPLE

The third common mistake that Christians make is writing off people whom God has not written off. That is part of the reason why so many feel distant from God. For example, the apostle Paul had taken a young man named Mark with him on his journey. Now Mark was not ready for martyrdom the way Paul was. Paul

was a zealot before he got saved, and he brought a great measure of that zeal into the kingdom of God. On the other hand, Mark was young. Perhaps he was thinking, "Look, Paul, I have a life to live. Everywhere you go, you are crawling out from under a pile of rocks. I am just not ready for that." So he left, and Paul was so angered by it that he wrote Mark off as useless and no good for the kingdom of God. In fact, Paul was so adamant about this that he even split up a good friendship with Barnabas over it (see Acts 15:38–39).

We pray for family members, communities, leaders—but sometimes deep down in our heart, we do not actually believe God will answer our prayers.

Of course, we know that God had not written Mark off. God was not finished with this young man, who eventually ended up writing the gospel of Mark! And so we must remember: We reap what we sow. If we sow judgment toward others who have failed in our sight, we reap judgment without mercy. None of us are walking in absolute perfection anyway. Learn to be kind toward others. Watch what happens when you start extending mercy to other people. Suddenly you will become very aware of the mercy and longsuffering of God toward you!

■ PRAYING WITHOUT FAITH

Another common mistake Christians are prone to making is praying

without truly believing that God will answer. We come to the prayer meeting because it is the thing to do. We pray for family members, communities, leaders—but deep down in our heart, we do not actually believe that God is going to answer our prayers. As a result, prayer becomes a mere religious exercise. That is why Jesus once asked, "When the Son of Man returns, will He find the kind of faith that will not give up until it has its answer?" (see Luke 18:8).

We see this in the early Church in the book of Acts. At the time, King Herod had been imprisoning Christians and he even killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. Many were pleased that such violent persecution was coming against the people of God. And so Herod seized Peter and put him in prison as well. He surrounded him with four squads of soldiers and put guards before the door of the prison. He intended to bring Peter out for judgment just to please this society's blood lust toward the testimony of Christ.

What did the Church do? They did what they knew they were supposed to do: They gathered to pray for Peter. I can imagine how the prayer meeting must have sounded. "O God, have mercy on Peter. O God, have mercy on the Christian Church. O God, set Peter free."

As they were gathered praying, the Bible tells that suddenly, *"As Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer. When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her gladness she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter stood before the gate"* (Acts 12:13–14). This is exactly what they were praying for! *"But they said to her, 'You are beside yourself'"* (verse 15). In other words, "You are mad." She kept insisting, "Peter's at the door. Peter's at the door." So they said, "It is his angel."

Have you ever noticed how we try to spiritualize unbelief?

In other words, “It is not Peter. It is just a messenger telling us that all is well. It is something spiritual.” Have you ever noticed how we try to spiritualize unbelief?

Peter continued knocking, and when they finally opened the door, they were astonished to see him. You see, they were praying for his freedom, but they did not believe God was going to answer their prayer! They did not believe that before the prayer meeting was over, the answer would be at the door!

May you and I not make this same mistake as we pray for a spiritual awakening in this nation. We must believe that when we pray, mountains can still be moved. Jesus made a promise that whatever you ask, believing, you shall receive (see Matthew 21:22).

You may have made mistakes, but God’s plan for your life has not been thwarted!

■ GOD’S PLAN IS GOING FORWARD

Here is the conclusion of what we have been discussing: You may have made mistakes, but God’s plan for your life has not been thwarted! Remember, Matthias disappeared, but Paul stood up and the plan of God went forward. And so if you are

disillusioned; if you misunderstood the Lord; if you felt like you were left standing like a fool in the presence of God; if what you thought was God did not materialize; or if you have not been believing your prayers will be answered—God has not forgotten you! He has not written you off. You are as precious to Him—as valuable to Him—today as you were before you ever even understood who He was.

Think about it this way: We all have made mistakes, we all have failed in some way—yet it is almost as if Christ needed a Church who understood what we really are without Him. That way, when He does what only He can do, we will not touch the glory that belongs to God alone. When our prayers are answered, when family members we did not believe God could save start coming home, we will not touch the glory! Furthermore, when we have been in that examining room with the Holy Spirit, we are no longer quick to judge others. We are quicker to embrace people in their weakness, for we recognize that we, too, have been embraced in our failure.

So take heart whenever you feel the temptation to weep bitterly over your failure. Allow the Lord to comfort you and touch your life with His mercy. Choose to believe that He has not forsaken you—that His plan for your life will be fulfilled. In fact, the best is yet to come!

Carter Conlon
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CARTER CONLON

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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.

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