

Dear Friend,

Welcome to 2021! Indeed, I am certain it will be a new and interesting year.

I find it interesting that the amazing Christmas narrative in the gospel of Luke, chapter 2, comes to a transition point in verses 20–21. In verse 20, *"the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen."* You could say that the high point of the season was now in the past and the go-forward drudgery of everyday life lay just before them.

Perhaps you feel that way today, wishing every day could just stay at Christmas. I suppose the shepherds might have wondered how the promise of this child would play out and what, if any, effect it would have on their lives. Now, out of their view (but not ours), comes verse 21: *"His name was called Jesus."*

The plan of God for the salvation and eternal glory for those who would believe was going forward, although it was mostly unseen. So, too, it is for you today. Though you don't see it, the faithful plan of God for your life and eternity with Him is right on course. Leaders rise, leaders fall. Society blossoms, society withers. Things come and go, but the plan and purpose of God for your future is actually more secure than anything you can naturally see.

Take a deep breath today and say, "Jesus, I love and trust You! Though I can't see what's before me, all will be well. I am safe in Your hand and it is You who are leading me in 2021."

Yours in 2021,

Pastor Carter Conlon

ARE THE THOUGHTS OF GOD FOOLISH TO YOU?

by Carter Conlon

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Did you know that God is thinking thoughts about you that you have not yet thought about yourself? He has a future and a hope for you that He already won for you 2,000 years ago when Jesus died on the cross for your sins. And when He rose from the dead, the scripture says He took your captivity captive and gave gifts to you—things that only He can do. That means He begins to operate through your life and make you into much more than you could ever hope to be in yourself.

We must stop thinking our own thoughts and begin to agree with the thoughts of God. We must get beyond the battle of the mind.

The verse goes on to say, *"Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your*

heart" (Jeremiah 29:12–13). What an incredible promise! God will listen to us, and we will find Him. We will know what He is speaking to us and how He is leading our life.

However, in order to get to this place, we must stop thinking our own thoughts and begin to agree with the thoughts of God. We must get beyond the battle of the mind. That is really where victory or defeat in the Christian life is found. If we never become people of faith, then we will live far beneath what God has for us. We must have a new mind—a new way of thinking.

The apostle Paul made a distinction between spiritual people and natural people. Natural people live within the parameters of their old thinking and therefore remain in a realm far beneath their inheritance in Christ Jesus. Paul told the Corinthian church, *"As it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God"* (1 Corinthians 2:9–10).

Natural people cannot know the things God has prepared for them. But when you came to Christ, God sent His Holy Spirit into your life to lead you into all truth. He gave you the power to live in the promises of God, and your life became everything that God has been thinking about you. Paul warned, *“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him”* (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Do you push away the things that God is thinking—those whispers that come into your heart every once in a while?

So here is my question to you: Do the thoughts of God sound foolish to you? Do you push away the things that God is thinking—those whispers that come into your heart every once in a while? Perhaps during your Bible reading one day, He spoke to you about something He has for your life that is far beyond your ideas about yourself. Do these thoughts of God sound like foolishness to you?

■ A GREAT AND EFFECTIVE DOOR

The apostle Paul once told the Corinthian Christians, *“For a great and effective door has opened to me”* (1 Corinthians 16:9). Now when we think of a great door, we think of a doorway to a palace, perhaps, or a doorway to power. But Paul did not see it that way. Paul was given eyes of the Spirit, because in the natural, it was a prison door that God was leading him to. Think about this for a moment. In the natural, Paul was going to be taken captive, put on a ship, transported to Rome and other places, and eventually

he would spend much of the remainder of his life in prison.

A lot of people lose their vision because of their circumstances. But picture the apostle Paul—led into a prison, chained between guards, with only a pen and paper in his hand. However, he somehow knew in his heart that a great and effectual door had been opened to him. Later, he was able to write to the people that he left behind in his journey, *“I believe that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose”* (see Romans 8:28). He was able to write to the Roman church, *“I believe that no mountain, no valley, no opposition, no power, no principality—nothing out there—can separate me from the love of God”* (see Romans 8:38–39). He believed that the victory was his, that he had been led into this place.

He understood that God’s thoughts about him were so much bigger than what the people around him thought or even what he thought about himself.

In the natural, Paul was a man who had been beaten and shipwrecked, stoned and taken captive. However, as a spiritual man, he was not living in those places. He was living in a place where he was walking in the thoughts that God was thinking about him. In the realm of the Spirit, he was not just visiting one church in Corinth. In fact,

he has been visiting every church for 2,000 years! He is even here today because we are reading his words. He is visiting you today in your living room, your situation, your marriage, your family, your life!

You see, it was as if the apostle Paul saw you in the future. You are what was inside this great and effective door that God was opening to him. He understood that God’s thoughts about him were so much bigger than what the people around him thought or even what he thought about himself. That is why Paul could write to the Corinthians, *“To the natural man, the thoughts of God are foolishness. But to the spiritual man, they are life and power for the journey. They are vision to understand something far beyond the natural confines of our lives”* (see 1 Corinthians 2:14).

■ IT ALL BEGAN AT STARBUCKS

Perhaps you are now wondering, *“Well, how does this apply to me? I am not the apostle Paul.”*

Let me tell you a story. Several years ago, a lady told Pastor Teresa and me how she started to pray, *“God, You must have a door for me. You must have something that You want to do in my life that I have not considered yet.”* As she prayed, suddenly a strong impression came into her heart: *“Go to Starbucks, order a coffee, sit down at a table, and just start reading your Bible.”* Those were the thoughts God was thinking about her! Isn’t that amazing?

And so she obeyed God and went to Starbucks. She ordered a coffee, sat down at a table, opened her Bible and began to read. After a little while, a lady who was also there having coffee came over to her table and asked, *“What is it that you are reading?”*

She answered, “I am reading the Bible. It is the Word of God.” The other lady asked, “Would you mind if I joined you?” She sat down, and the lady who had heard from God realized that her new friend was not a believer. She was able to share Christ with her. Finally, the lady asked her, “Do you think we can meet back here again next week?”

We forget that almost everything we do for God starts with a small beginning.

The next week the new lady came back accompanied by about six friends. They were all sitting around the table! Eventually, this Christian lady had a discipleship group of brand-new believers in Christ, and every week everybody was bringing somebody else. By the time we talked to her, she was leading a group of between forty to sixty women in a study of the Scriptures! This was just somebody who began to seek God and ask, “What thoughts do You have for me?”

We always want to go from zero to a million people in a conference somewhere and we forget that almost everything we do for God starts with a small beginning. As it says in Zechariah, “Don’t despise the day of small things” (see Zechariah 4:10). I believe God is reminding you today that what He has called you to do will be done. So when He

speaks to you, do not think that His thoughts toward you are foolish, even if it seems that way in the natural.

After all, who would have thought this kind of evangelism could happen at Starbucks? Remember, it was not just sixty women finding Christ as their Savior. I am sure that each of those women went on to have an effect on their world. Many of them probably will lead their husbands to Christ. Many of their families will become Christian families. Many of their kids will begin to go to church. A number of them will go on to become great evangelists in the Kingdom of God, winning thousands to Christ. And finally, when this lady who went to Starbucks appears at the throne of heaven one day, there will be a hundred thousand people saying, “Thank you for what you did in Starbucks that day! Thank you for opening your Bible. Thank you for obeying God. Thank you for letting the thoughts of God govern your life. Because of you, we are here!”

God’s ways are foolish to those who live in the natural! But I believe it is much better to be counted a fool to the world and live for God.

Remember, “a great and effective door” may look small in the natural. Imagine the people in Corinth who did not have a spiritual mindset, shaking their heads and saying, “Well, whatever happened to the great door that God was going

to open for Paul?” He ended up chained between soldiers, and all he had was a piece of paper and some ink. All he could do was write some letters to some of his friends.

Yes, God’s ways are foolish to those who live in the natural! But I believe it is much better to be counted a fool to the world and live for God. Remember, His thoughts toward you are of peace and not of evil, to give you a hope and a future. And if you are willing to embrace His thoughts rather than counting them foolish, you will see that He is indeed able to do exceedingly abundantly above all you can even ask or think!

Carter Conlon
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TAKING *THE 260 JOURNEY* IN 2021

Recently, during a sermon at TSC, Pastor Tim Dilena mentioned the quote, “God is great at being good.” How true that rings for 2021! As we reflect on this past semester, we are in awe of His goodness. He has kept us and will continue to keep us in the days ahead.

As we launch into this new year, we welcome students back to a spring semester like none other. During this moment in history it is imperative, perhaps more than ever, that students leave our doors understanding the goodness of God and the truth of His Word.

One of the things we are excited about this year is the release of Pastor Tim’s new book, *The 260 Journey*. It is a Bible companion that delves into the New Testament, one chapter at a time, walking through the entire New Testament in 260 days. The neat thing is that

if you read one chapter a day, Monday through Friday, you will finish the study in one year. We love this concept and are excited to introduce this resource to our students and staff. One of the foundational elements of a student’s time a Summit is learning to develop a deep, meaningful devotional life. We can’t wait to get started!

We hope you are inspired this year to dig deeper into God’s word! You will be amazed at His goodness. From all of us over here in Pennsylvania, we wish you a joyful, healthy and wonderful 2021. We pray the Lord bless you and keep you this year. And hey, if you want to follow along with our devotional journey, you can do that by buying the book on Amazon or **tsc.nyc**, following the devotionals on **260journey.com**, or signing up to receive it daily via email.



ORDER NOW! amazon.com + tsc.nyc

Carter Conlon is General Overseer of Times Square Church, Inc. He joined the pastoral staff as an associate pastor in 1994 and was senior pastor from 2001 to 2020.

Times Square Church is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City, founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the Switchblade.”

Senior Pastor
Tim Dilena

Church Online
Sunday 10 AM & On demand
Tuesday 7 PM (Prayer Service)

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