

Dear Friend,

Ecclesiastes 3:1 says: *"To everything there is a season; a time for every purpose under heaven."* The season I have been privileged to enjoy as Senior Pastor of Times Square Church has been a joyful one indeed. Yes, even with its mountaintops, joys, valleys and sorrows, I can truly say that I wouldn't trade a day of it for any other pathway.

Jesus said that being born and led of the Spirit resembles the force of wind in nature—we can't determine exactly where it came from or where it is going. Living for God is as exciting as it is rewarding and my wife Teresa and I truly look forward to what Jesus has for our future together.

According to the scriptures, I am now one of those old men dreaming dreams! I have a dream of countless thousands of men, women and children being eternally set free! I dream of churches vibrant, prayerful and spiritually alive once again. I have a dream that under the guidance of Pastor Tim Dilena, Times Square Church will reach heights of life and joy which will be wondrous to behold! And I have a dream that I will live to see and enjoy it all.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for sharing this part of the journey with me. I will still be here at TSC as a help and a guide. Please pray as I go through the door which God has opened before me. May your life and mine count for His eternal glory until the day we are all home.

Love you so much,
Pastor Carter Conlon

WILL I EVER BE FREE?

by Carter Conlon

"When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, 'See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them'" (Matthew 8:1-4).

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I believe the following question tugs on the hearts of many Christians today: Will I ever be free? Surely the leper in the above account was living with the same question in his heart. In those days, leprosy carried a stigma with it so severe that the person with the affliction was required by Old Testament law to put a veil over his face. This speaks of the necessity for the person to mask his or her true condition. They walk through society feeling unclean, pretending that they have victory when they do not—as is the case with many in the Body of Christ today.

The leper's condition may have started small—perhaps as a little spot under his eye—but eventually

it began to consume him. Similarly for many today, captivity starts as a small thing. Consider how so many people in this generation are trapped in pornography, not realizing its mental and physical repercussions. They may have started viewing something online, unaware that it was going to make an impression on their brain and become part of their character. They thought they could contain it, but now it has spread throughout their mind, and they are captivated by it. Pornography puts people in a prison from which it is almost impossible to escape, apart from the power of God.

Or think of the person who just reached for a glass and thought, "I can consume this little bit of alcohol. What harm can it do?" They thought they could control it, but now it controls them. Or maybe it started as just a little bit of depression, but now it seems to be a darkness that literally envelops them. And now they are left with a cry in their heart, "Oh, God, is there any hope for me? Will I ever be free?"

■ THE HUMAN CONDITION

The apostle Paul speaks of the condition of the human heart in the book of Romans: *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find"* (Romans 7:18). In other words, "I know what I should do;

I know what my life should look like. But somehow I have lost the power to move in that direction. *“The good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice”* (7:19). Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever made a New Year’s resolution only to have it crumble into the sand ten minutes after midnight? You were convinced that it was going to be different this time. You were going to be that husband or that wife that you never had been. You were going to be that father, that brother, that friend. You were going to be honest. You were not going to lose your temper. You were not going to drink. But it was not long before you were right back in your old behaviors because you are imprisoned.

Paul goes on to say, *“Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good”* (Romans 7:20–21). In other words, “I want to do right, but something has gotten hold of me, and it is consuming me. It sends me on a pathway that I do not want to be on—practicing things that I know are wrong. *“For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (7:22–24). Who will set me free? Who can make a difference in my life? Then he says, *“I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* (7:25).

That is where freedom is found, just as in our opening passage when Jesus reached out and touched the leper. I love that picture. Jesus simply touched him, and healing came immediately. No terms, no

conditions. He did not say, “Let’s go back and talk about who caused this in your life. Did your father love you? Was your mother kind?” He just reached out because here was a man who knew what he was: someone who could not change himself; a man who was sick of feeling unclean.

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When you become sin-sick, you are at the beginning of a healing that only God can bring to His people. You get to the point where you say, “I don’t care who knows what I am. I want to be free. I want to be clean.” By stepping out of the crowd and saying what he said, the leper was identifying himself to the multitudes that were all around Jesus. He stepped out and admitted, “I am dirty. Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.”

■ **EVERYTHING POINTS TO CHRIST**

Interestingly, after Jesus healed the man, He said to him, *“See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them”* (Matthew 8:4). This may seem a bit odd unless we remember that everything in the Bible points to Jesus. You see, before the world was even formed, God knew His Son would have to come and die in order to redeem those who had been created in His own image. Therefore everything, even in the Old Testament, points to the Savior. So let’s look in the book of Leviticus to better understand why Jesus gave the man those instructions.

“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest. And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine him; and indeed, if the leprosy is healed in the leper, then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living and clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop’” (Leviticus 14:1–4). It was understood under Old Testament law that leprosy was an incurable disease that only the hand of God could heal. And if God, in His mercy, chose to heal you, then a gift had to be offered in the temple before God as a testimony.

“The priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water” (Leviticus 14:5). Note that after Jesus had died on the cross, the Bible says, *“One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out”* (John 19:34).

“As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop” (Leviticus 14:6). *“Where they crucified Him”* (John 19:18). The cross would be the cedar wood. So one bird was to be sacrificed, and one was to be washed in the blood. But it was to be done in conjunction with wood, which represents the cross of Christ.

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The book of Matthew tells us that the soldiers stripped Jesus, and they put a scarlet robe on him (see Matthew 27:28). As Jesus was

dying on the cross, *“they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth”* (John 19:29). So now we have the cross, which is the cedar wood. We have the robe, which is the scarlet. And then the hyssop that they put to His mouth. Everything in the Old Testament points to Jesus Christ!

“Dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. And he shall sprinkle it seven times [which means the perfection or completion of God] on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field” (Leviticus 14:6–7).

In other words, the one who is cleansed in the blood is to be released—no longer confined or restricted but sent into the open field! And the purpose is not just to fly around aimlessly, for all creatures in nature—birds in particular—do what God tells them to do. And so when Jesus sets you free, you become what God has designed and intended for you to be. Remember, the Bible says that if you are in Christ, you are a new creation. The old things in your life have passed away. Old bondages have lost their authority over your life; old prison gates must open and let you go. You have been set free by the blood of the Lamb to go and become everything God has called you to be.

■ THE LORD IS WILLING

The beauty of this whole story is the fact that God still desires to touch you, even though something may have put you in bondage. You may feel ashamed, you may be rejected by people—even those who claim to be followers of Christ. But,

remember, Jesus was not offended by the leper who came to Him. He was not at all affronted by his condition. As a matter of fact, Jesus reached out and touched him immediately. You see, every time the Son of God encounters an honest heart, He simply reaches out and touches.

You and I are living in an hour when the Church has to be free.

Perhaps the question in your heart is, “So, what do I do now?” I encourage you to press through the crowd. Die to your pride. Go to Jesus and say, “Lord, if You want to, You can touch me and cleanse me.” If you come with an honest heart, I can assure you that He will reply, “I want to.” He always has wanted to, and He always will want to! That is the reason Christ came to earth. He came to set you free and give you a new future.

You and I are living in an hour when the Church has to be free. We have to have a living testimony of Christ. After all, it is hard to argue with a leper who has been miraculously healed. It is time for the Church to arise and say, “Lord, touch my life. Set me free and send me into the open field—wherever it may lead, whatever it may require.”

If you let the Lord touch you, people will begin to look at your life and say, “That is the bird who used to live in a cage. There it goes!” You are going to fly through your city. Everywhere you go, there will be something noticeably different about you. You will not be bound by the cords of this society any longer. And you will understand and experience what

Jesus talked about when He said, *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32).

Carter Conlon
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2:00 PM Class/Electives
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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 10AM | 1PM | 3PM | 6PM
Tuesday 7PM | Worldwide Prayer Meeting
Friday 7PM | Young Adults (18–35)
Teens Night (1st Friday)
Small Groups
Special Events

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

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