

THE PUREST MEASURE OF SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

by Carter Conlon

We are called to be living witnesses for Jesus Christ in our generation. You may be one of the many who go to church and listen to the choir sing, the preachers preach, and the missionaries share their stories, yet you feel something is missing. You may feel insignificant and wonder if God has something for you to do that He would consider successful. You want to hear these words spoken one day in eternity, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." This leads you to ask the question, "What is the purest measure of spiritual success, and how can I attain it?" If you are truly a Christian, God will place His heart of passion for lost humanity within you. As you read this, I believe the Holy Spirit will reveal God's heart to you. You will find a new sense of divine purpose, and an awareness of what the purest measure of spiritual success really is.

■ HOW DO I KNOW GOD'S HEART IS BECOMING MINE?

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall

be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:1-7).

In this parable, the heart of God is being revealed. As a Christian you should be asking yourself, "How do I know that God's heart is becoming mine?" Paul said, *"As we behold Him, we are changed by the Spirit of the Lord into His image"* (2 Corinthians 3:18). Your life is intertwined with His. You are no longer your own, you have been bought with a price. You are to glorify God, and the best way to do this is by allowing His heart to be manifested through your life. When people interact with you, it is Christ they should be seeing. The Christ in you should touch them by your love.

How does Jesus want to reveal His life through you?

■ LONGING FOR THE THINGS OF GOD

All that God has created waits longingly for the children of God to be made fully known. *"For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God"* (Romans 8:19). This verse will be fully realized when Christ returns. There will be an order reestablished in the world that was brought out of order when sin entered into the hearts of men. However, until that day arrives there is a longing in the hearts of men to

know who God is, and what He has for each of His children.

Before you came to Christ, this longing drove you into relationships, or compelled you to do and say things you began to despise in your own heart. You may not have realized why you could not stop yourself on this journey, but you were on this path because of the longing to come back to God. You were created for fellowship with God and He has stamped an eternal purpose of Himself in your life.

This same longing exists in everyone you come in contact with. It can be disguised by violence and vulgar speech or by a nonchalant attitude about life in general. But the reality is, this longing is for something of God which He has chosen to reveal to mankind through you. This is the purest measure of spiritual success. So ask yourself, is your life a manifestation of God's heart to man? Can you walk away from most encounters and say, "Jesus, Your heart was made manifest here?" If not, why not? How does Jesus want to reveal His life through you?

■ IS IT TURNING FROM SIN AND OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S COMMANDS?

Does spiritual success happen if I simply turn from sin and obey God's commands? If I choose to be a righteous person, will the heart of God be manifested through me? Yes, but this is only the beginning of a pathway that leads to something much deeper. Folks, you can be obedient and yet be nauseatingly religious; to the point there is

nothing of the depth of what God wants to manifest through you to the people around you. We see this illustrated in Matthew 19:16. A wealthy young man came to Jesus and asked, “*What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*” Jesus answered him by asking if he knew and kept the commandments; then He proceeded to list them. The young man said he had done all those things from his youth. Therefore, he could be considered an obedient young man who had taken seriously the Word of God, turning from the sin of his society and living a good moral life. But still he felt a lack within; he felt he was still on the outside looking in. In the presence of Jesus he could feel the love of God toward him, and he knew this is what was missing. Obeying truth and the Word of God is an absolutely essential building block in your Christian life, but if that is all you are doing, you are still missing the purest form of spiritual success.

■ IS IT THE MANIFESTATION OF THE GIFTS OF MINISTRY?

You may ask yourself if the manifestation of gifts is the purest form of spiritual success. Is that what God wants your life to become? Yes, there are wonderful, supernatural gifts of ministry that God implants in your life. You could not possibly have these things without Him. But again, this is only part of what He has for your life. However, if these gifts are not given to the deepest work of God, they can lead to spiritual corruption. We have seen this throughout church history, and even in our generation. Men who are not surrendered and are not manifesting the fullness of God’s heart to the people around them, begin to love power and recognition in the church. They love the praise of men more than the praise of God. They will eventually get to a place where they will condemn others whom they do not perceive as rising to

their level of professed spirituality. There can be God-given leadership ability, but if it’s not moving a person to the purest measure of spiritual success, it can ultimately end in pride and ruin.

■ IS IT PRAYER AND READING THE BIBLE?

Again, you may ask yourself the question: Is it prayer and Bible reading which will manifest God in and through my life? Well, of course, these things are essential, but they can also fall short of what truly represents Christ among men. James 4:3 tells us that prayer can become self-serving. When we fail to embrace the heart of God for people, our prayers will be all about ourselves. James says, “You ask and receive not, because you ask that you may consume it upon your own lusts” (James 4:3). And there are many people today, especially in the western world, whose focus is solely on themselves.

The church is powerless when she does not have the heart of God in her.

In Matthew 6:7, Jesus said that prayer can become an empty repetition. Likewise, I know people who have memorized ten times the Scripture that I have, but there is little of Christ in them. They are as dead as a tape recorder; push a button and they play back Scripture. They can quote the Word but they do not manifest the heart of God toward people. James 1:22 tells you that you can read the Bible and actually understand Scripture without allowing it to bring you into any true spiritual action. This can lead you into a place of self-deception. If any man hears the Word and does not become a doer, he just simply deceives himself. In 2 Timothy 3, the Apostle Paul

tells us that this will be the spiritual climate among much of those professing religion in the last days. There will be a love of personal pleasure which will lead to a powerless, empty profession in those who are called to represent the heart of God. Paul said that they will always be learning, but never coming to the knowledge of the truth; they will have a form of godliness, but their lives will be a denial of the power of God.

■ HOW CAN WE MEASURE SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

The purest measure of spiritual success can be found in Luke 15:4, “*What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?*” It’s so simple that we should really consider this for a moment. God created the universe—there is a lot more out there than just planet Earth. Actually, we are just like a speck of dust in the universe. He created angelic beings by the tens of thousands who worship Him without ceasing, but Jesus left the adoration of heaven to come to earth just for you. I hope you appreciate that! It is in Christ that you find the full embodiment of the heart of God among men. He left all of glory for you. Likewise, you are called to leave all ambition that leads you any place other than into God’s will. You are called to lay down things that want to grip your heart and mind, so you can embrace this heart of God.

The church is powerless when she does not have the heart of God in her. They can preach, sing and study, but if the heart of God is not manifested, they will resort to gimmickry and entertainment to bring people into the house of the Lord. People will come for the music and entertainment or for the dynamic speaking, not because they possess the true heart of God.

Jesus could have descended from heaven on a platform and spoken to the whole world at one time, if it was solely about drawing crowds of people to Himself. But I see the purest manifestation of the love of God in John 8, when Jesus stoops to help a woman who is condemned and friendless. For Jesus it was all about the individual, the one who had strayed from the ninety-nine. In Mark 10, He was encompassed by a crowd of people pressing in from every side with their various agendas; however, in spite of the multitudes, He heard something that stopped Him in His tracks. It was one person standing on the edge of the road, crying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” He halted and ministered to the one blind man, because Jesus was the embodiment of the heart of God. Popularity was not His goal, because He already had the crowds. No, He was showing us something deeper than the crowds; He was teaching us to be sensitive to the cry of just one person. In Mark 8, we see Jesus taking yet another blind man out of town and ministering to him alone. Can you see the spiritually ambitious ones who were around Him? “Jesus, if You’re looking for spiritual success in the world, it’s over here. The crowds are here—where are You going?”

The heart of God is not about crowds but about the individual.

In John 4 once again, we see the people of Samaria did not come out to hear what Jesus had to say, until after He had first stopped at a well and ministered to one rejected and thirsty woman. This is the purest manifestation of the love of God.

Aren’t you thankful that God doesn’t see you as a crowd, but as an individual? He loves you passionately

and personally. His focus is on you. He knows every hair on your head and every thought in your mind. He knows your future. He knows the thoughts He thinks toward you. He left the ninety-nine to seek you out. This accounts for the strange drawing you experienced in your heart before you came to Christ; it was the Holy Spirit drawing you. Jesus was coming to you, to rescue you and deliver you.

■ JESUS CARRIES YOU ON HIS SHOULDERS

When He found the lost sheep, He laid it on His shoulders rejoicing (Luke 15:5). I think of the cross, how He found me and brought me into victory. He laid me on His shoulders and took the weight and penalty of my sin upon Himself. He said to rejoice with Him for He had found the sheep which was lost. Not, “Rejoice with Me because I have found the crowd who was willing to follow Me,” or, “Rejoice with Me, for I preached to a hundred thousand last Friday.” No, He is saying, “I found you, one person, so now rejoice with Me.” Do you realize that when He found you, on the day you came to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, there was a shout in heaven from all the angels?

■ DO YOU LOVE ME?

John 21:15–17, tells us that after the resurrection Peter went back to fishing; and one day he heard a voice calling to him from the shore. He knew it was the Son of God, so he immediately leapt into the water and swam to shore, because he passionately loved Jesus. His risen Savior had made a fire and a meal of fish and bread for Peter and the other disciples, and He fed them individually. Jesus then asked Peter a profound question: “Do you love me?” No doubt, Peter had a lot of ideas about ministry; in fact, all the disciples did. Every man had a concept of who the Son of God should be. When He asked Peter if

he loved Him, I believe Jesus was actually asking Peter, “Do you love what I do? Do you love how I do it?”

A lot of people love God, but they don’t love what He does and how He does it. Oh, they love the flash and the dance and the power; they love all those things, but they don’t necessarily love Jesus and the way He does things. They will use Jesus to get to what they think spiritual success is. You see, if Jesus had wanted to, He could have walked out onto the water to meet Peter. He could have shown some great display of power or He could have spoken from the clouds, but instead, He came tenderly to Peter as an individual. He came manifesting the heart of God the Father and His love for each person. “Peter, do you love this about Me? Do you love the simplicity of the manifestation of God’s heart for the individual?”

Leave behind all your personal ambition and your view of success.

If you don’t love this, you will never know what ministry really is. Ministry can become a handy cloak for never fully realizing the heart of God. The heart of God is not about crowds but about the individual. It is about the ones I meet Monday through Saturday when I’m not preaching from the pulpit. It is about the kind of man I am becoming in Christ and the true heart of God that is being manifested in and through my life. It is a word of kindness for the individual people who are going to hell for eternity; it is a heart that genuinely sees the waywardness of men and women with God’s compassion. That is the purest measure of success in ministry. It is not what people may

see, but what God sees. It is the effect on hurting, confused, struggling people's lives. They have failed and they don't know if there even is a God. But as I reach out to them individually, God's heart is truly made manifest.

■ FEED MY SHEEP

I think the revelation of God's heart came to Peter at the very moment Jesus asked him the question, "Do you love Me?" Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, you know I love You." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep, feed those created in my image. You know how tender I am, Peter. I could have judged you a hundred times over for all your failures. You even cursed with an oath that you did not know Me, but I came back to you again. I did not let Satan get you; I prayed for you and I have come to you. Would you abandon the idea that ministry is power and crowds? Leave behind all your personal ambition and your view of success. Would you leave the ninety-nine and go to the one? Would you find them? Would you let them know that I love them? Would you let my love be manifested through you to them? Would you bring them to my shoulders so that I may carry them and take them home, that we may rejoice together for all of eternity? I have come to you alone; now you go to them in the same way—love them in the same way."

■ IF JESUS WERE HERE TODAY, HE WOULD TALK TO THE DRUG ADDICT

If Jesus were present in a physical body here today, He would be in your neighborhood. He probably would stop and talk one-on-one with the drug addicts or the confused children, not in a group,

but personally. He would knock on the door across the hallway and visit that lonely person who just never seems to go anywhere, and doesn't seem to have anybody who cares. He would most likely bring something to eat, maybe cookies. This is the purest form of spiritual success.

All who accept Christ as Savior have this same resource to love people the way God does. If you start seeing that as success, you won't have to apologize when you get to the throne of God. If you learn to love the Jesus who ministers to the one and let Him love them through you, you will be showing the world the purest measure of spiritual success. Start where you live: your friends, your apartment building, your neighborhood, your family, your work associates. Success in the realm of the Spirit is the manifestation of God's love to individual people.

Carter Conlon
February 18, 2007
©2008 Times Square Church

This message is an edited version of a sermon given in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website www.tscnyc.org or calling 1-800-488-0854. You can also write to: Times Square Church, Tape Ministry, 1657 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. 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 written permission from Times Square Church. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the King James Version.

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 & Eighth Avenue

Mailing Address:

1657 Broadway, 4th Flr.
New York, NY 10019

e-mail:

info@timessquarechurch.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	

tscnyc.org