

How a David Wilkerson Prophecy Guides This Landmark Church, Prayer Movement

Carter Conlon believes the end times are imminent—and Christians must pray now more than ever for the next generation.

Conlon is the senior pastor of Times Square Church in New York City, a position he inherited from David Wilkerson in 1994. Wilkerson is well-known in Pentecostal circles for writing *The Cross and the Switchblade* and founding the ministry Teen Challenge. He founded Times Square Church in 1987 after seeing Times Square populated by prostitutes, drug addicts and X-rated movie houses. Today, the church is a thriving megachurch in the middle of Broadway, serving around 10,000 attendees locally and another 810 home fellowships across the country digitally.

Conlon says all this growth is purely God's doing, since the church doesn't even have a promotions department. He also believes the best is yet to come. He bases that on a prophetic word Wilkerson gave him.

"David Wilkerson told me before he died that Times Square Church was going to be a lighthouse in a very, very dark time," Conlon says.

Conlon believes that destiny is tied to the church's location in the heart of New York. *Travel + Leisure* lists Times Square as the third-most visited tourist attraction in the world—drawing 50 million visitors each year—and New York is the most populated city in the U.S. Conlon says whatever happens in New York City tends to touch the rest of the world—and what's happening in the world is often crystallized in New York City.

"We call it the prophet of Baal," Conlon says, pronouncing the Canaanite false god as "bale." "But the way it's actually pronounced is 'ball.' That's very interesting."

He pauses, clarifies—"It's just a word picture I'm presenting you"—then continues: "In Times Square, everybody gathers every year, hoping for a better future, and they wait for Baal to drop every New Year's Eve. Then everybody claps and shouts, and then they go home angry because they are not seeing it. I have seen the anger once Baal has come down and nothing has changed. And only hundreds of feet away from where Baal comes down is the presence of God."

Conlon says every year metaphorically presents a "Mount Carmel situation" all over again, with Baal and God held in contrast. He calls it "ironic"—disappointed people turn to fear and anger when the true hope they seek is right there.

"There's a collective cry," Conlon says. "If we assume there are 8 million people in New York City, I'd venture to guess probably up to half of those people are crying when they go to bed at night."

It goes beyond New York City. Conlon sees a generation in emotional and spiritual pain. He's heard a single mother say she doesn't know how she'll feed her children tomorrow. He's heard an 11-year old boy say he's bullied daily and doesn't want to live anymore. He's heard of grandparents from Bible Belt cities found dead in their cars, overdosed on opiates to numb the pain of living. And he knows he isn't the only one who hears them.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'I have heard the cry of my people and I've come down to deliver [them],'" Conlon says. "Now Moses didn't hear it, but God heard it, and He let Moses know that He had heard it. When we go back to prayer, I think we're going to become aware that there is a cry now."

Conlon says so many people crave help and hope.

"Whole cities in America have been declared zones of emergency because of opiate addiction," Conlon says. "We've got all kinds of celebrities now wanting to commit suicide, losing reason to live. The hopelessness of this moment in our society is obvious."

But Conlon also sees hope. In Luke 4:18, Jesus opens the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and reads, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."

Later, in John 20:21b, Jesus says, "As My Father has sent Me, even so I send you."

Conlon believes the American church has fallen short of that calling.

"If the Spirit of God was on Jesus for that reason, then the Spirit of God is on us for the same reason," Conlon says. "When we turn inward and make the whole thing about ourselves, we fall into a terrible error and powerlessness that leaves the nation almost spiritually bankrupt—which is where we are today. Thank God there are pockets and places where the truth is still sought and preached, but by and large, if we were doing what we were called to do, this nation would not be in the mess it's in today."

But the situation is not hopeless. Conlon has gone through a personal transformation from being self-focused to others-focused, thanks to the power of prayer. Through it, God has transformed his church, his community and his city. And if what starts in New York spreads to the rest of the country, revival is yet possible.

"You see that all throughout history, one voice," Conlon says. "Somebody came to the throne of God. Somebody started talking to God about the situation, and the Lord did a miracle. That's

what I'm believing for in America. I am honestly believing for a maybe-final spiritual awakening for this nation."

Power of Prayer

Conlon starts his days with prayer. He has a standing teleconference call at 6 a.m. with seven strong Christian men. For one hour, they pray the Word of God and petition His throne room for solutions to problems ailing society. After that, Conlon transitions to a personal devotional time, which he devotes to reading and praying through the promises of God.

It wasn't always like that, though. Conlon says he used to be an immature and self-centered person, and God used prayer to refine his character and draw him closer to Himself.

"When I came to the Lord at 24, I was really not a caring person," Conlon says. "I really didn't care about anybody. I didn't much care even about myself at a certain point. Yet I began to read in the Word of God about the love that we're to have one for another, the love that God has for us, and I simply just turned to the Lord and said, 'God, I'm reading about something I'm not experiencing. You're going to have to do it in my life.' Little by little, line by line, moment by moment, what was simply a desire became a reality."

He views prayer as "an intimate conversation," one in which he invites the Holy Spirit to make what he reads in Scripture a part of his everyday life.

"When your heart is sincere, it always opens the doorway to do something you could never do in your own strength," Conlon says. "You could never even hope to achieve it. You could never hope to accomplish it. It's something God chooses to do when you and I choose to pray."

Conlon says that, like Esther entering the king's throne room to plead for her people, believers have authority in prayer to fight for their nation.

"We're fighting now for the very future of a nation," he says. "We can stand at the throne of God and ask Him to act in the context of His character. He's proven His responses throughout history. He's shown that when we come to the throne of God to pray, He will answer us."

Self-Focused Prayers

Sadly, many believers never witness the true power of prayer because they don't understand it. Conlon says they have great intentions and a desire to become more like Christ, but they don't grasp why God gave us prayer. That misunderstanding has left the church impotent and put the nation in jeopardy.

"I don't think you need to be prophetic to see the danger that we're in as a nation today," Conlon says. "I think through casualness, self-focus and carelessness—just like previous generations—we've let the truth and the power of God slip through our fingers one more time."

This misunderstanding is particularly pronounced in the U.S., Conlon says, because some have confused American values with Christian values.

"The focus in the house of the Lord turned inward," Conlon says. "In the American Constitution, there's this inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Unfortunately, we allowed that same pursuit to come into the theological focus of the house of God. Most of what was preached in the last three decades was about my life, my liberty and the pursuit of my happiness. When self-focus becomes the norm in the Christian church, it takes away the power of God from our lives, because the true power of God, of course, is found in living for the benefit of others. That's what the cross was all about."

The church swallowed this self-centered lie and let its guard down for decades. Now the country is reaping the consequences.

“When the church turned inward, we became weak,” Conlon says. “When we became weak, the forces of darkness started to advance. I feel almost like Belshazzar. Remember, they had the holy things of God, and they were drinking from them at this great banquet and feast. While they were doing that, their enemies surrounded the city. We’re in a situation like that now.”

Conlon says he does still see some churches in America fulfilling Christ’s commission. And he especially sees the church thriving internationally.

“You couldn’t take 90 percent of the sermons that are preached in this country and preach them in China today,” he says. “They don’t fly because the people are suffering there. Their church knows what its purpose is: They’re to stand for truth and light in the midst of a darkened time.”

Conlon believes it’s time for the American church to rediscover its identity and its power. It’s an idea so important to him that it’s the title of his new book: *It’s Time to Pray*.

“Instead of being on a battleship, we found ourselves on a Caribbean cruise,” he says. “We forgot that we’re called to fight for this generation. When Nehemiah was sent back to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem, he approached the people and he said, ‘Fight for your sons. Fight for your daughters. Fight for your families.’ In other words, we’ve got to get back to a focus that’s bigger than ourselves. We can’t just live the Christian life for ease, for personal happiness.”

But that means a radical reorientation to the way many think about prayer and God’s power. First, Conlon says, God gives His followers power for a purpose. Those who seek the power or Spirit of God just to have an amazing experience or “feel God” in their lives are just seeking a “sensory delusion.”

“The pursuit of power without purpose equals delusion,” Conlon

says. "It's like a man who goes to the gas station, but he's pouring the gas in the back window of the car or in his trunk. You're pouring the gas in every place other than where it's supposed to go because the tank is already full. The purpose of that vehicle is to take you to a destination, but you're not willing to go to that destination, so you keep putting gas in the wrong places until it becomes an absurdity."

What's more, Conlon says those sensory delusions will only become increasingly strange and absurd, because what they're chasing isn't God—it's an experience more powerful than last time. There's no purpose undergirding it. And that's not what the Holy Spirit was meant for.

"In some churches, we have relegated the Holy Spirit to an absurdity," Conlon says. "There's no other way to describe it, because we're seeking power without purpose. If we were all being put in jail tomorrow, it would change everything. All of the stupidity that goes on in God's name would be over in a day, because the rubber would now meet the road. I need the power of God for a divine purpose now. I'm no longer just seeking God so I can have some absurd manifestation come on my life. I need the power of God to literally survive and to stand for Christ."

Other-Focused Prayers

To unlock the true power of prayer, pray for others. Conlon believes authentic prayer should be focused on others and not ourselves. That's why, at his church's weekly prayer meetings, he tells everyone gathered, "Listen, we're not here to pray for ourselves. We are here to pray for others."

He's never experienced a shortage of others who need prayer. At the Times Square prayer meetings—which stream worldwide to 197 countries—prayer requests come in from around the world, even from Muslim nations like Syria, Iraq and Jordan. Prisoners locked in solitary confinement send prayer requests

for hope. Children as young as 8 ask for prayer to fight suicidal thoughts.

“There’s a biblical principle in the measure you give out, it will be given back to you again,” he says. “As we pray that others will be set free, we will be free. As we pray for others’ families to be healed, God will bring healing into our families. So the focus is not on ourselves. The focus is on others.”

When prayer is directed outward, Conlon has seen God do incredible things. Several years ago, he visited Jos, Nigeria, the site of a civil war between Muslims and Christians. Conlon intended to hold a public gathering with both sides—the first public gathering in weeks—to tell them about the gospel. He was quickly informed that this was a “suicide mission.” The last time there had been a public gathering, 6,000 people were killed.

Conlon replied, “Is the Christian life just about how long we live, or is it about obeying God and doing what He asks us to do? If it is the end of my journey in Nigeria, and it is the will of God, isn’t that the better place to be than staying here and keeping myself safe and accomplishing nothing for the kingdom of God?”

He prayed. He believed God with all of his heart. And he went to Jos.

The first night, roughly 500,000 people came to hear the gospel. At least 100,000 came to Christ. The civil war raging in that region came to an end.

“God answers prayer in a powerful, phenomenal way, when the motives are right and when we’re moving in the right direction,” Conlon says.

Window of Mercy

The power of prayer can change the world. It's not just a biblical fact for Conlon; he's seen it with his own eyes. He is believing and interceding for a final spiritual awakening for his own country—but he can't do it alone.

"An awakening is going to have to start in the house of God," Conlon says. "It's not going to start in the streets. It's going to start among the people of God, where people have the courage to say, 'Lord, would you forgive me for living my life for myself?'"

But it's a race against the clock. Conlon believes the time may be running out for believers to reach the world.

"I think we're watching this world fold up," Conlon says. "I'm personally convinced we're seeing the final launch of a worldwide rebellion against the lordship of Jesus Christ. I believe we're entering the days Paul spoke about, the days of lawlessness in 2 Timothy 3."

Conlon believes that the church lives in a closing window—and that makes the most important prayer of all a plea for more time to reach more people. It's a plea for mercy on a fallen world.

"At this point, I'm asking God for the sake of people who can still hear His voice and still hear about His cross and salvation, 'O God, have mercy,'" Conlon says. "'Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on this generation. ... You had mercy on me, Lord; have mercy on these people.'"

He's praying for a corporate return to the throne room of God. He's praying that the entire church rallies together to raise a "clarion call" for a lost society, that every man, woman and child would know they can have eternal life through Christ who loves them so much He died for them.

But he fears what may happen if the church misses its Christ-commissioned calling one more time.

“If we don’t take this window, there’s a darkness on the other side of this moment of mercy,” Conlon says. “If we don’t pray now, we will definitely wish we had prayed 10 years from now.”

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