

Is This Radical Message the Answer to Our 'Self-Love Generation'?

In his book *It's Time to Pray: God's Power Changes Everything*, Pastor Carter Conlon of Times Square Church encourages Christians to die to self, sacrificially love others and, above all, love God.

It's a radical message and not just because this generation has been called the "self-love generation." Nor is it because Conlon's church is set among billboards, chain stores and other emblems of self-focused consumerism.

It's a radical message because selfless love toward others goes against our very nature as fallen humans.

"We are all born, without exception, selfish in the core of our beings. This self-focus is entrenched in our sinful nature," Conlon says. "The general human tendency is not to be focused on the well-being of other people."

It's Time to Pray calls Christians to believe in the impact of their prayers on their lives and the lives of others. Conlon writes on praying for transformation in one's faith—for strength, for a spiritual awakening and for a servant's heart.

He believes it's impossible to call oneself a Christian and yet not be invested in the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of other people. Especially since Jesus pressed His followers to love both your neighbors and your enemies (see Matt. 5:43-44).

Jesus modeled the other-focused, Spirit-empowered love Christians are called to embody. He healed the sick (Matt. 14:14), raised the dead (John 11:43), preached the kingdom of

God (Mark 6:34), fed the hungry (Matt. 15:32), cast out demons (Matt. 8:16) and prayed for others (John 17:20). He did all these things with compassion, at times even weeping. Most of all, He sacrificed Himself so that those who believe in Him will not die but live with Him in heaven forever (John 3:16).

This love-in-action example should be an inspiration for Christians. Conlon uses David Berkowitz, the "Son of Sam" murderer, as a modern-day example. Berkowitz, who is serving six life sentences for each murder he committed, is now a born-again Christian, eager to tell people about Jesus. In prison, he brushes the teeth of new prisoners who are too beaten up to brush. He helps them clean up, all while telling them about how much God loves them.

From these stories as well as personal experiences, Conlon shows how loving and serving God means loving and serving others no matter who they are or how they treat us. This kind of unconditional love is what Christians are called to pray for in their lives. We must seek to grow in this by the power of the Holy Spirit.

"When you live to serve others, it leads you into places where you are stretched beyond your natural ability," Conlon says. "Because of this, it leads you to a place where there needs to be a life other than your own that carries you through and gives you strength to be an ambassador for the mercy of God, forgiving those who, in your flesh, you would be inclined to hate and never forgive."

He writes on how Christians are called to dip bread into the wine of their sacrifice and hand it across the table to their Judas. Too easily we pray for our bread, fixating on exclusively ourselves as we say, 'Give me my daily bread. Forgive me ... lead me ... deliver me ... protect me ...'

Conlon exhorts Christians to pray for others because, once that happens, "everything changes." We experience growth in

our self when we, surprisingly, take our eyes off ourselves and set them on God and His children.

“The ultimate expression of how deeply I really do love God is based on how I interact with other people,” Conlon says.

Through actions, Christians can demonstrate a devotion to the first greatest and the second greatest commandment:

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37-38). {eoa}

*This article is based on It's Time to Pray: God's Power Changes Everything (GPC Books, 2018) by **Carter Conlon**. Conlon is senior pastor of Times Square Church in New York City, an interdenominational church with more than 10,000 people in attendance, representing more than 100 different nationalities. He joined the pastoral staff in 1994 at the invitation of founding pastor David Wilkerson, author of the best-selling book The Cross and the Switchblade. He was appointed to the office of senior pastor in 2001, and he continues to be a voice for God far beyond the pulpit of Times Square Church. He is invited to speak at numerous conferences across the country and around the world. His weekly radio spots on 1010 WINS, the nation's longest-running all-news station, and his sermons, interviews, and call-ins have been featured regularly on Times Square Church Live, a weekly radio broadcast on WMCA 570. Time to Pray, Pastor Carter's one-minute devotional and thirty-minute program, is currently syndicated on over 350 Christian radio stations worldwide. He is the author of several books, including The 180 Degree Christian, Fear Not and Unshakable. All net profits from It's Time to Pray! are donated to the Carter Conlon Compassion Fund. For information or to give, go to*