

Megachurch Pastor Preaches Forgiveness to Country Suffering Genocide

“You have the obligation to model the cross of Jesus Christ and teach forgiveness, even for those who have killed your loved ones and would kill you.”

Pastor Carter Conlon of Times Square Church tells this to several thousand Hutu and Tutsi pastors at a gathering in Burundi. In his book *It's Time to Pray*, Conlon describes how God dismantled a barrier and allowed several pastors from Burundi and Rwanda to come forward for an altar call.

One of the pastors began to wail. All Conlon could think was, “This must be the sound of a person coming home to find his or her family murdered.”

The message he preached at a subsequent rally was about forgiveness. Notably, forgiveness of one's enemies. For the Burundi people that were present, the pain of the genocide still hung in the air. Yet Conlon was assured to speak truth into their situation.

“‘The Bible says if any man says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar.’ I took that message to a nation where the wounds of genocide were still open and seeping,” Conlon says.

However, his faith and strength of conviction did not come from himself. In fact, his first night in Burundi was spent pacing the rooftop of the compound where they were camped. Conlon felt overcome by dread as he feared there would be another uprising. Earlier that night, he heard screaming and an explosion. As he paced back and forth, he kept having to remind himself over and over again what God had sent him to

do. Through this, he regained confidence.

Before Conlon was called to speak truth to the thousands, he was a 24-year-old cop in Ottawa who believed he had no use for religion. He knew a Christian police officer who would speak to him about faith and salvation. But Conlon didn't pay much attention to what he said. Until the cop shared 2 Corinthians 5:17:

"Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Look, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Conlon recalls the cop telling him, "Carter, if you will consider giving your life to Christ, He will change you from the inside-out. The old things in your life—the old struggles, the old trials, the character traits inside of you that you can't change, the fears, the frustrations, the prison doors that you can't open ... God will do that for you."

Conlon gave his life to the Lord and, although he had stage fright and no public speaking skills, he prayed:

"Lord Jesus, I want to win 100,000 people to You before I die."

Twenty-five years later, in a field outside Jos, Nigeria, God answered his prayer. But that was only the beginning. Conlon carried his message of Jesus's life-renewing power across the globe.

In Burundi, he told the crowd about a group of people who also lived in a society looking for vengeance. Only this was 2,000 years ago, shortly after Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead.

"Everywhere they walked, people were talking about violence and vengeance. But, they had begun following the one who had told them they must forgive to know His power," Conlon says.

That day, Christ's message about letting go and forgiving others spanned centuries and resonated with the Burundi people. Conlon predicted that they would be in unity; that men and women of different tribes would embrace and love each other again. All by the power of the Holy Spirit.

"If we are willing to open our hearts and let Jesus Christ come in; if we receive Him as our Savior; if we are willing to agree with God to turn us from old things to His truth; we must also ask God to fill our hearts. And we need to simply believe God—to have faith!" Conlon says. {eoa}

This article is based on It's Time to Pray: God's Power Changes Everything (Charisma House, 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 30-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 .