

Stop Trying Harder

by Carl O'Donnell

This sermon by Pastor Carl O'Donnell emphasizes the importance of stopping the cycle of trying harder and instead making better choices with God's help. He shares personal stories and insights on how trying harder led to failure and guilt, but making better choices transformed his life and ministry. The message focuses on the need for personal revival and seeking God's guidance in decision-making.

Scripture: Matthew 5:3, John 12:32, Psalm 51:10, Proverbs 3:5, James 1:5, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 5:16, Philippians 4:6

Topics: "Making Better Choices", "Seeking God's Guidance"

Description

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Transcript

So my name is Carl O'Donnell and I pastor the Pembroke Baptist Church, which is just across the St. John River from Woodstock, New Brunswick. And even though we're a small number here today, here at Lincoln, apparently there's folks that are watching online and so on, not just today live, but in the future we'll be watching this. I do want to say before I forget, my email address is Black Salmon Lad.

I'm from the Miramichi. There's a lady here from over in Sunny Corner and I used to fish a lot of black salmon on the Miramichi and everybody's a lad on the Miramichi. So that's my email address, BlackSalmonLad at gmail.com and I'd love to hear from you.

So I'll get that out of the way. There's people praying for me today and I really appreciate it. There really are people praying for me.

They've been texting me all day and yesterday saying they're praying for me, people from the church that I pastor, family and friends, and I'm just so grateful to be here. And they're all saying the same thing to me, just be yourself, just be yourself. That's what I'm gonna try to do, be myself.

My wife said I'm proud of you and get a haircut. So I got a haircut and I'm glad she's proud of me. I know this is a revival conference and we've had all kinds of wonderful speakers on revival but they don't have the information that I have because I found the recipe for revival.

I brought it with me, it's only a page and a half and here it is. I'm going to read it to you. This is the recipe for revival.

Up in the hills of old Kentucky, the meanest place that ever was struck, there lived a man named Jacob Job, the meanest man on this old globe. He feared not God nor cared for man except his wild and wicked clan. He had six boys, both big and bad, who followed right behind their dad.

They drank that wildcat whiskey down and painted red the country town. He had six gals, big husky gals, who pranced and frolicked with their pals. They danced and capered on the hills and sometimes tippled at the stills.

One day an awful rattlesnake bit that oldest boy, big wicked Jake, and through his veins the virus flew. He's bound to die, what will we do? In haste they sent a runner down to fetch a parson from the town, a Dutchman of John Wesley's band, as good as any in the land. He prayed a wondrous, curious prayer in words of faith both rich and rare, and if to heaven it reached or not, on earth it surely hit the spot.

Oh God, he prayed, we thank thee for this snake that thou hast sent to bite old Jake, to fetch him down from his high hoss and lead him to the Savior's cross. And now, oh God, the great I am, please send another to bite old Sam. And Jack and John, the worst of rakes, oh God, we need more rattlesnakes.

Send chicken snakes to bite the gals and all their dancing wicked pals. Even Mama Jobe, she needs one too, perhaps a copperhead will do. And now, oh God, before it's too late, please hurry up these gospel snakes, and save this old Kentucky state.

I ask it all for Jesus' sake, amen. The theme of my talk today is, you see it behind you on the screen there, stop trying harder, start making better choices. Sometimes that only happens when we're on the flat of our back, that we, God has our attention.

Sometimes revival only happens when we're about at our wits end, and we feel like we're so far away from revival, we feel like we're just drained, but we don't realize we're just a whisker away from revival when we're at our lowest. It was advertised as a church planters assessment for couples many years ago, and it was taking place at Kingswood University in Sussex. And it was for couples that were interested in going for one week, you stayed on campus, there was 12 or 14 professional people there to see what made you tick.

There was a Christian psychologist, there were denominational leaders, all kinds of really caring, loving staff there to analyze as many as 10 couples that could go for the week to go to this spiritual boot camp. The cost was \$1,000, and I said to my wife, if I'm going to shell out a thousand bucks, I want somebody when it's all over to really tell me how I did. Don't just pass me, tell me how I really made out, don't give everybody a gold star.

So we signed up, and the meals were excellent, the accommodations were excellent, and you had eight hours to sleep, but other than that, you were being analyzed and scrutinized and put through your paces. They put you on purpose with other couples that they thought maybe you didn't quite think the same way. They put you in situations that were stressful and under a deadline, and to see how you would do.

You'd be eating your toast in the morning and look up and somebody would be looking at you with a pencil writing on a notepad. You just were analyzed in every way. That's what it was for, to see what makes you tick.

Well, the week went by, and so at the end was an exit interview, where they would take each couple privately into the boardroom there at the university, and they'd sit you down, and there'd be three or four of these assessors would sit with you, and in the most kind and loving and caring way, they would tell you how you did or didn't do on the week. So we sat there in a couple black leather chairs, and three or four gentlemen in suits sat across from us, and they began to give my wife Melanie her test results, what the assessors had thought of her. This was probably a half an hour process, and she aced it.

She aced the thing. They said, if you were here for another week, you'd be part of our assessment team, and I thought, wait till they get to me. They turned to me and they said, you know, Carl, in some ways you're off the charts in a positive way, but then there's this other group of things in your life that somehow you don't seem to take seriously, but we want you to know that those are things you need to take seriously, and of course those were things that my wife had been telling me all my life I should take seriously, and now I was paying a thousand dollars for these guys to... So I sat there, you know, just with a stunned look on my face, and as they spent that half an hour in a kind, loving way, trying to help me, trying to help me, and they said, you know, only one assessor out of 14 assessors recommends that you would pursue planting new churches, continuing on in that way.

I didn't know what to say, didn't know what to do. Oh, it was things like, I was in charge of the money back then, of our family income, and every bill got paid, but it got paid late every time, and of course I'd be at work, who would get the phone calls, you know, and I would say to my wife, you know, the car's fine, just don't fill it more than half full, or the gas tank will leak, you know, so don't worry about it. Just stuff like that.

There was dozens and dozens of things like that, because I thought I was too busy preaching, I thought I was too busy trying to be three places at one time, I had too many firecrackers that I was trying to light all the time, and don't bother me with trivial things, I'm trying to do the Lord's work. That was the way I thought, and I'm ashamed to say that, you know, things like following through didn't seem like they were important to me. Things like keeping my word didn't seem like it was that big of a deal, because I had important stuff, you know, God's work to do.

Anyway, we had this exit interview, and then that was the end of the week, so we stood up, probably they prayed with us, I don't remember, but we shook a few hands, and I went upstairs in the university to my friend's office. He was one of the professors. I'd been taking a course on church planting, and his name is Vic Stonehouse.

I went up to Vic's office, and I was guessing he was the guy that had voted for me to proceed. He was a friend of mine, and he was one of those assessors. We walked in the room, and he just burst into tears, and Vic just burst into tears.

He could not stop crying. He just kept taking Kleenexes and putting them up to his face, and I know now why. It's because he felt so bad that I had tried so hard.

I had been driving to Sussex from Carleton County. I'd been staying overnight with he and Joan, and I'd been paying attention. I'd been working so hard, trying so hard, and it just ended in a big train wreck, and there was my dear brother, Vic Stonehouse, just weeping.

He couldn't stop crying, so my wife and I excused herself, and we went down to get in the car to leave. I had an old Toyota Camry then, and turned the key, the car wouldn't start. Every time it threatened to rain, that car would not start because the distributor cap was cracked, but it was one of those things, you know,

I said, I'm too busy working on a message.

I'm too busy trying to do this. Don't worry about the car, so there I sit. It's clouding over, and the car won't start.

Back I go with my hat in my hand to ask those pastors and psychologists and denominational leaders, is there a few of them could push me off the property? So it was a standard car. You put it in second gear, turn the key halfway, and there's a hill as you leave Bethany Bible School, Kingswood. They got me, you know, I can still see in the rear view mirror those guys in suits pushing me off the property, and that thousand dollars just bulging out of their pocket.

Anyway, I started down the little hill, popped the clutch, and we started to drive back home to Fredericton and on north up to Carlton County. My wife told me later she thought I was going to go into a depression. We drove along, you know, we didn't say too much, and I was just trying to think about all this, and the sun came out, and we got to Fredericton, and we said, I don't know if it was her or I, but one of us said maybe we should stop a Canadian Tire and get a distributor cap, and the first thing went through my mind, well it's sunny now, the car is working great, you know, and but that's just the way I thought, you see.

I don't have the money, I'm too busy, I got too many things to do, you know, maybe something will come up, I don't know. You know what it's like to think wrong, don't you? Don't you know what it's like to think wrong about certain things? You don't know why, you just get, you just get thinking in wrong patterns about something. Maybe it's setting boundaries, you know, and that's just something that it's just such a mountain for you to grasp, or maybe it's forgiveness, or maybe it's, you know, a million things, and we know it's easy to think wrong about stuff.

So we pulled into Canadian Tire and I said, well let's stop and see how much they are anyway, and I get out of the car. I was, I was just this close to being in tears anyway. I get out of the car and ripped the entire seat out of my pants.

It was a pair of brown corduroys that I always wore to baptize people, and I just ripped the whole seat out of my pants, and I put on a jacket and walked into Canadian Tire and my wife was in the car. I know it sounds funny, but it wasn't funny at the time. Oh, I was really, I was devastated.

I was tore up, I was tore right to pieces. Talk about being far from revival, you know, you've come to these meetings thinking, man, I want to be revived, I want to be revived, and you might feel like you're far from revival. I couldn't have felt any farther from revival, but little did I know that I was just a hair away from revival.

Isn't that interesting? You know, wherever you're at today, don't feel like you're a million miles away from being revived. Don't feel like your church is a million miles away from being revived, because quite often, you know, it's, it's, we have to stop trying harder before God can even get our attention, and sometimes the only time we stop trying harder is when we find ourselves in a real pickle. That's where I was in there with my coat on, my wife's in the car, we just left the college an hour ago, and I'm standing at the parts desk at Canadian Tire, and I wish I could take every one of you right there, because I could tell you right exactly where I was standing.

They've changed the parts counter now, but it wasn't that long ago, I went and stood right in the aisle to that spot, which was just feet from where I stood there that day, because I stood there thinking, this is

crazy. I don't have the money, I don't have the time to be standing here, they're busy, and, and yet I was wrestling with what my wife was probably out in the car praying about, and what those brothers that loved me had just told me, you know. So the guy comes up and he says \$67.12 or something like that, and I thought, holy Toledo.

Anyway, I bought it, got it back in the car and drove home. Well, the next day or two, I was up early, the kids were just little then, and it wasn't quite time for me to wake them up, and I had a little fire going in the stove there in our, in our mini home, in our living room, a little fire going in the glass stove, and I was sitting in a green Lazy Boy chair there, and everybody was asleep, and I was thinking about all this, and I was thinking, this is what I was saying to myself, Carl, you've got to try harder. You know these things, these things they've told you? You've got to try harder in your personal life, in your pastoring life, and I started making a mental list about all these things.

I've got to try harder to do this and this, and then all of a sudden, I just felt this just weight just began to settle in on my head, and I thought, you know what, I've been trying harder all my life to do these things, and it's not working, it's not working, and I got all teared up, you know, there sitting there by myself, and I thought, what do I do? What do I do? I just bought a new living translation of the Bible. I'd never had one before, and I, they were just fairly new then, and I had bought a New Testament there, and it was laying open to the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5, and we all think of the Sermon on the Mount, that first Beatitude is, blessed are the poor in spirit, and Sarah's going to put up on the screen there right behind me. If you look in the New Living Translation, it says, blessed are those that realize their need for Him, Matthew 5 and verse 3, and those notes behind me are from the David Jeremiah Study Bible.

At the bottom of the page, it describes what it means to be poor in spirit. The humble, those with destitute hearts, sense their spiritual need and seek after God. They have the advantage, and I asked Sarah to put that in capitals, the advantage and the great joy of being able to cry out to God for help, and I looked at that verse there in Matthew 5 verse 3, the first of the Beatitudes, the blessed are the poor in spirit, and I thought, that's not a sermon for you to preach, Carl, that's for you, that's for you right now, that's for you as a Christian, and God spoke to me right at that moment, and He said, Carl, stop trying harder, start making better choices, stop trying harder on your own, start making better choices as I help you, and I don't know if that means a thing to you or not, but to me, there's two different worlds, trying harder versus making better choices with God's help, and I can't tell you, but that little, that little mini home with the fire and that green chair became my place of revival.

Revival began because I began to think a little bit differently. Here, just minutes ago, just 30 seconds before that, I felt like just the weight of the world was on my shoulders, and all of a sudden, I'm in revival, because God spoke to me through His Word and by His Holy Spirit, stop trying harder, start making better choices. Well, that began one of hundreds and hundreds, and right up till even to today, me trying to ask God, can you help me, Lord, because I always want to revert back to that trying harder business.

Can you help me? And that's my prayer. It has to be my prayer on a regular basis, or every time I try harder, I fall flat on my face, but when I step back, say, God, let's look at the big picture here. God helps me.

I make better choices. I'm all for living in the moment. I'm going to get Sarah to put that, take that back off and go back to our title, stop trying harder and start making better choices, and it's such a difference, such

a difference in practical ways and in spiritual ways, too.

It's a whole different way to live. For instance, in practical ways, I get up from the green chair, and we got the kids off to school, and I said to my wife, can we get our power bill on equalized billing? She said, sure, we can get it on equalized billing. It was a practical thing that we could do.

We put our power bill on equalized billing. It was the same every month. I could handle that.

I was still running the money back then. I could handle that. I didn't have to try harder to, you know what I mean? That was one practical thing.

We started paying with cash for things more. I'm not saying this is what you have to do. I'm just saying not using cash, using credit wasn't working for me.

Trying to pay my power bill when it came in the mail wasn't working for me. I did it, but it was always late, as I said. Other practical ways, when I'd say to people, I'll get back to you, that wasn't working for me because I had too many irons in the fire, spinning too many plates.

You know what that's like to have so many plates you're spinning all the time, and you don't know how many people you've said, leave that with me, will you? I'll get back to you. That stuff wasn't working for me. It wasn't working for me as a pastor, as a husband, in dealing with my kids, making promises, and I had to stop that.

I had to say, Lord, I can't try harder to have a better memory. I can't try harder to follow through with things. You and I have to figure this out, Lord, how I can make better choices that will help me, and that's what I'm here to talk to you today about.

I don't like to talk about the way I used to think. I don't like to talk about the old Carl and the way I used to be, but in one sense it's a reminder to me what God has done, and so I just share it today to say God wants to, he's no respecter of persons, God wants to do amazing things in us and meet us right where we're at. So, in spiritual ways, as a pastor, and I hope there's pastors listening and watching online, and I'm sure there are pastors here and Christian leaders as well.

In practical ways, one of the bags of rocks that I carried around as a pastor was sermon preparation. Almost every week I'd say, I've got to try harder next week to be better prepared. You get up Monday morning, your feet hit the floor, you're a pastor, you like to visit with people, the phone rings, you love it, you love to be with people, you love to pray and be going and doing and fellowshiping with other pastors and so on, but hardly a week went by there for those first ten years of my being in full-time ministry that I wouldn't say, I've got to try harder to get my act together earlier in the week and be better prepared for what I've got to say.

And so God and I began to talk about this because I'd beat myself up and all that stuff. You have issues in your life that you're trying harder on, right? You beat yourself up on them. Like Dr. Phil says, how's that working out for you, you know? It wasn't working out very good for me.

Being a pastor was a stressful thing. There were some Sunday mornings I had to call my father-in-law, Jack Salmon. He's long gone now, but I'd say, Jack, I've worked all week, I haven't been lazy, but I just don't have it together.

And this is like five o'clock in the morning. He'd show up at 11 o'clock and preach for me, you know? And I'd say to the congregation, you know, just pray for me, pray for me, pray for me. Stuff like that.

So this is part of the reason why Greg Gordon asked me to speak today, because Greg thinks I have a unique sermon preparation plan in place. Now I've never heard of any other pastor that does this, but I'm sure there are other pastors that do it. But this is what the Lord and I have going on.

On Monday mornings, I get up, my mind is blank, as it normally is, but it's an extra blank on Monday mornings. I get up before breakfast, just like you do, and I start to do my own personal devotions. And through that, I feel, if God is speaking to me about this, maybe God wants to speak to somebody else about it.

So I start writing some notes to go towards my message. If it's speaking to me, a thought, a text, or whatever, I think God will speak to somebody else. So I have set myself up on a schedule where every Monday, I have to preach at 1.30 to 80 to 100 people, every Monday at 1.30 in the afternoon.

And on Monday morning, when I get up, I have no message, but by noon, when I get ready to leave the house, the Lord and I have worked that out together, and I've discovered I can be just as inspired on Monday morning at 7 as I can Saturday night at midnight. I can be just as inspired. And so I generally preach to that group at the seniors' home in Woodstock and their families.

We have a church service there every Monday at 1.30, and I hardly use any notes, maybe just three or four sentences, but I'm just sharing what God has been speaking to my heart about. Then, this is the part that Greg especially wanted me to share, is then on Monday nights, there's a group that meets in someone's home, and it's open to anyone in the church, so there's usually about a dozen people show up, and I say to them, this is what I may be preaching on on Sunday. I've already preached it this afternoon to a group of seniors and their families, but this is what I'll probably be preaching on Sunday.

What do you think of that? How is God speaking to you from this text? How is God speaking to you from this thought? And so we pray and do sort of a Lectio Divina-style Bible study where we'll pray, then we'll read the verses, and then we'll pray again, and then we'll say, this is a verse that God's speaking to me about. And I'll just sit there with a blank piece of paper and just start writing notes. I show up every week to that meeting with just a blank piece of paper and just start writing notes.

And we have two 20-year-old young ladies that attend that, Nolly and Anita, and they'll start saying, you know, this is what God would say to me from what you're talking about, Pastor Carl, and they'll start sharing things, you know, how it applies to them, and I'll start writing stuff out. Their grandparents, Norton and Annie, are there. They're in their mid-70s, and they say, this is how this verse is speaking to me.

Verse 3 is speaking to me, or verse 5, and they'll share that. Then I have a friend there, Rex. He's of a different denomination.

And he's there, and he'll say, well, you know, this is what the Lord is saying to me from this verse. This is what I get out of this. And I'm just writing.

I can't write fast enough. I cannot write fast enough, Pat, on Monday nights, as I'm just feeling blessed, because these people are saying, God's Word is speaking to me, and I'm just, the smoke's just coming right off my pen. And we're together, we're building the message for Sunday.

Greg says that's unusual. And it works for me. I'm not saying you have to do it, pastors, but I'm saying it works for me, because for 10 years before that, I carried around a bag of rocks, said, Carl, if you just tried harder to get your act together on sermon preparation, you'd do a better job.

If you were doing a better job, the church would be full, the bills would be paid, the treasurer would be happy, revival would be, but it all was on my shoulders. Just try harder. I just thank God that he said to me that day, Carl, stop trying harder.

Start making better choices. I can't tell you what that's meant in my life. I wouldn't be here today, that's for sure.

I would be showing up in church somewhere, I wouldn't be a pastor, but I'd be sitting somewhere in the church, probably in the back row, and I'd be, every Sunday, saying, Lord, I just wish I could try harder, because look at all these people that are doing so much better than me. And I'd be beating myself up, week in, week out, trying harder. I'm so glad that's not what the Christian life is.

Aren't you glad that's not what following Jesus is, trying harder? It's making choices with God's help, God helping us, helping us see the big picture. So for the last 15 years, this is how I've been preparing sermons. A good friend of mine was in a session one time, and somebody floated the idea about getting other people to help pastors get their messages ready.

And I really respect this guy, and he said, wouldn't that turn into a sermon stew? Wouldn't that be just a hodgepodge of ideas and stuff? And that's never happened. It's never happened. We're in one mind, one accord.

And sometimes I don't use, maybe don't even use that message. In fact, some Monday nights, as we get discussing it, I realize, you know what, this isn't a topic that I'm ready to preach on yet, because I don't know what I'm talking about. And that's a great help, too.

Better before than after the message is preached, right? I just thank God, because I have enjoyed being a pastor so much these last 15 years. Well, it's actually about 20 years now. I've been pastoring full time now for a little over 30 years.

And the last 20 years of doing these things, being a pastor has been such a blessing and such a joy. And as Andrew and I were talking earlier, Andrew said, the thing that jumps out at me is that, wouldn't that be helpful to this 12 people that show up? And I said, you bet. Your life it is.

We're doing devotions together. We're studying God's word together. We're applying it together, praying for one another.

Before we leave, you know, the conclusion of that is in that Lectio Divina style is, what am I going to do about that? How does God want me to apply this verse? And so we share that, pray for one another, and out we go out the door. That's a little bit of my sermon preparation, making better choices. For me, that was God helping me make a better choice.

Maybe God wanted me to stay in the ministry, to stay being a pastor. And he said, I've got to help this guy out here. He's trying harder, and he's blowing it.

And so this is how God has helped me. And I pray that it might help somebody else. It feels like sermon preparation.

You love it, but it's like carrying a big sack of rocks around. Another thing is visiting people, visitation. I love to visit people, and I love to be around people.

But it's difficult. How am I going to visit a 50-year-old lady that starts coming to our church who's a professional person? How am I going to start visiting a 22-year-old girl that starts coming? To get my wife's schedule, to coordinate with mine, and then with that young working person, it's next to impossible. And so, again, I thought, I've got to try harder.

I've got to try harder to be better at visitation and all that stuff. And the harder I tried, the worse things went. And just recently, within the last year or so, I realized one day, one Monday I got up and I said, I've got to visit so-and-so.

And I started writing down names. And I had 25 people's names written down that were new people to our church. Or if they weren't coming to our church, they were calling me or texting me, asking me spiritual questions.

So at that point, there was 25 new people. And I started to revert back to that trying harder. I thought, I've got to try really hard to befriend all these 25 people, build relationships with them, and get them on board.

And then I realized, no, Carl, that's the old way of thinking. That's the old way of thinking. So I began to pray about it.

And God reminded me when I was down in Florida a couple of years ago at the Brooksville Wesleyan Church. We stepped in there that first Sunday. My wife and I were down there for four or five weeks on a vacation.

And it was a church of 700 people. Jerry Pence is the pastor. And I'm sitting there thinking, wow, their choir loft here is as big as our church.

And I'm thinking how nice it is, but how impersonal it is. And just now, Pastor Jerry Pence says, if anyone's here today, you came to church and you're praying for someone, there's someone that's heavy on your heart, or you have a prayer request, while this song is being sung and while one of our pastors is praying, we'd like you to come forward. It was right in the middle of the service, maybe even 15 minutes into the service.

And they said, you can kneel or sit at the front here, and someone will pray with you. And I was the first guy on my feet. There was someone on my mind that I was praying about.

I was tightened up in my stomach about something. And all of a sudden, that church of 700 people became just as personal as the little country church. And I was the first guy up there.

Someone prayed with me. And I went back to my seat feeling like I had really connected with somebody. And we started doing that in our church.

I looked at that. I looked at that list of 25 people, and I thought, there's no way that's going to happen, that I'm going to be able to minister to those people one-on-one like I'd like. I told that story one Sunday in church that I just told you.

And I said, someone's coming to lead in a song. And if anybody wants to come forward in our church and sit on the front row, I'll go down and pray with you for a moment or two while the song is being sung, and then you can go back to your seat. I hadn't even got a piece of gum in my mouth.

And the whole front row was full, and there was people sitting at the altar. That's how hungry people were for some kind of personal contact. Couldn't believe it.

The people that were up singing that first Sunday sang the whole hymn through twice, all the verses through twice. We didn't know what to do. And I was just praying with each person.

Because people can relate to what it means to try harder, try harder. Nothing's working. You know, having burdens for people.

But this is what God and I have worked out. This is what God worked out and I agreed to it when it comes to visitation. And visitation for a pastor, here's Andrew, he's a brand new pastor just as of June of this year.

He's the pastor here at this church. You know, some pastors, it's like they're carrying a hockey bag full of gear around with them when it comes to sermon preparation, another hockey bag on visitation. And I beat myself up too many years trying harder and failing miserably.

And I'm glad that God has better choices. I'm glad for that. You can relate that to your life, I'm sure, in ways that if you just give God a chance to do that.

Well, the other day I got a call from a guy in our church and we were chatting and he said, what are you up to? And I said, well, I was up on the roof putting new mortar on the chimney. And that's what I'd been doing for about an hour there, one of those last sunny days before this cold weather socked us all in. And I'd been up on the roof cleaning the chimney and I noticed that some of the mortar between the bricks was cracking and so I mixed up a little bit of mortar, went up there with a trowel and I think they called it repointing your chimney maybe.

And as best I could, I spent an hour and a half putting new mortar between the bricks. So anyway, the guy calls me and says, I called you, you weren't home. I said, I was up on the roof and I'm doing this to the chimney and this is what he said, was it leaking? No, he said it was leaking, was it? I said, no, it wasn't leaking at all.

And I realized I was a different guy than the guy that stood a Canadian tire that day. Wrestling was spending 67 bucks. This was just last week.

And I realized, Lord, I almost cried because I thought, Lord, you're helping me. You're helping me to make better choices. And that's just a crazy illustration about a chimney trying to, you know, look after it before it breaks.

But spiritually, God is helping me that same way to deal with things before they break. God wants to help each one of us to stop trying harder and start making better choices. I'm going to grab this guitar here and sing a song.

And as I sing it, you might want to close your eyes and just listen to the words and let God speak to you about this topic, would you? In fact, let's stand as we consider this. And I, if I be lifted up, he said, will draw all men to me. I raised my eyes to the skies and said, his love lifted me.

Reach up for him. You know, God's reaching down for you. You can never seem to know.

Don't you think God knows just what you're going through. The miles of space, God's amazing grace can span. Reach up for him.

Reach up and touch God's hand. The faintest flicker of faith, my friend, is all God needs to see. There's no need for words when your thoughts are heard.

And his love lifted me. Reach up for him. You know, God's reaching down for you.

You can never seem to know. Oh, don't you think God knows just what you're going through. The miles of space, God's amazing grace can span.

Reach out for him. Reach up and touch God's hand. Lord, I pray that today, the rest of this day, when I'm tempted to just try harder on my own strength, that I would just step back and say, let's approach this a different way, Carl.

Let's make better choices with God's help. Lord, I pray for that one today that is used to trying harder and failing and then feeling guilty over it. And the whole cycle begins all over again.

I pray for those pastors that might be listening to this or watching this today or in the future. If this could just give a pastor a little bit of hope, a little bit of some tools for his toolbox, then Lord, everything we're doing is so worthwhile. We know, Lord, that if we're not in revival personally, it doesn't matter where we are, we're not in revival.

But if we are in revival personally, if you're personally reviving us, then wherever we are, if we're in the deadest church or the deadest job, we're in the middle of revival because you're reviving us from inside. So, Lord, may that be our case. And it's in Christ's name we pray.

And everybody said amen and amen. Please stop by and pick up some literature I have out on the table that talks a little bit about what I said here today. God bless you.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/4LIV75eaVYU.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/carl-odonnell/stop-trying-harder/>

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