

# When Winning Looks Like Losing

by Carter Conlon

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*Carter Conlon's sermon explores the paradox of winning through losing in the context of Christian faith and the early church's experiences with persecution and obedience to God's call.*

**Duration:** 41:10

**Scripture:** Psalm 30:5, Matthew 16:25, Luke 6:38, Acts 8:1-8, Acts 9:1-6, Hebrews 12:3, James 4:10

**Topics:** "Persevering Through Trials", "Gods Sovereign Power"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's strength in times of persecution and challenges, highlighting the need for believers to see victory in the midst of trials. It encourages listeners to trust in God's power within them, to step out in obedience, and to understand that what may seem like losing is actually winning in the kingdom of God.

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## Transcript

Go with me to the book of Acts chapter 8, please, if you will. Acts chapter 8, and as you're doing that, we'll pray. Now, Father, I thank you with all my heart this morning for truth that sets people free.

I thank you for truth that gives us vision, understanding of the day, the hour, the seasons, the times, and even the way the kingdom of God works in the earth. I ask you, Lord, to deliver us from all of our enemies, deliver us from evil, lead us not into the temptation to be discouraged or to put away our confidence in Christ. God, I thank you, Lord, that you will anoint me to speak this word, that you will overshadow this frail human vessel, that you will implant your thoughts in my heart and allow me to speak for you.

I pray for those that are gathered to listen today, here physically, and those that are online with us today. I pray, God, that you give us open hearts to hear, a willingness, Lord, to embrace something other than our present view, which may not be correct. I pray that you help us, God, all of us, Lord.

I bless you for it with all my heart today, in Jesus' name. I want you to pray a simple prayer before I begin this message. Just say, Lord, I want to see.

Well, that's God's going to answer that. If that's a sincere prayer in your heart, he's going to help you to see something. And it may be something that changes your future, changes the course of your life.

It'll change the way that you will begin to approach the circumstances that you have to face and I have to face today and tomorrow. When winning looks like losing, Acts chapter 8. Now Saul, verse 1, was

consenting to his death. That's the death of Stephen, a young disciple.

At that time, a great persecution arose against the church, which was at Jerusalem. And they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him.

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

And the multitudes, with one accord, heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed. And many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.

And there was great joy in that city. Now, the scripture tells us that this was a season of great sorrow over a precious young man who was put to death with seemingly no law to protect him. A young man who stood for truth, a young man who stood up for what he believed was right, a young man who was given to serving others.

And yet people, envious and jealous of the truth that was in his heart, rose up, wanted him out of their midst. They were offended by his life and by his testimony. And it seemed like there should have been a law.

There should have been some kind of law in place to protect people from this kind of action. But it seems, seemed like law and order in that regard was breaking down. Also, in verse one, it tells us it recognized religious authorities, which is who Saul was at this time, were consenting to the persecution of true followers of Jesus Christ.

After such a glorious beginning, they were forced to flee for safety from an increasingly hostile society. Just like in this nation, for example, we had a glorious beginning in many regards. Now, some of it was inglorious, I understand, historically.

There was a measure of Christianity that was deficient, and its practice was deficient. But still, God raised a nation, and in just a few hundred years, things were accomplished in this nation that the rest of the world over thousands of years were incapable in their own strength of accomplishing. And I believe that in great measure, it was because people came together and were unified in measure, at least in the understanding and the worshiping of God.

And in the book of Acts, you'll see that in chapter two, the Holy Spirit is poured out. Cowardly Peter is given boldness, and he stands up in the midst of a generation that he was once afraid of. Preaches with an eloquence that's far beyond his own ability to do.

We know that from the history of this man. In that day alone, that day when the Holy Spirit was outpoured upon the church of Jesus Christ, 3,000 souls were added. I mean, it must have seemed like it just can't get any better.

3,000 people receiving Christ and being baptized. The believers at that time in Jerusalem continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers. It must have been an amazing thing to be part of that, coming together, having communion, coming together and praying,

coming together with a genuine fellowship that could only be produced by the Spirit of God.

They were praising God, and the scripture says in chapter two, verse 47, that they had favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. In other words, their society began to look favorably upon the testimony of Jesus Christ through his people.

All the people, it says, they had favor with all the people, and daily new souls were being added to the church at that time. Chapter three shows us how the miraculous power of God was flowing through the disciples, even as they went just to pray that people who were lame were being healed. Chapter four tells us when this initial, an initial persecution came just against a couple of them.

They went into prayer. They had raised their voices to God. They quoted scripture, and the place where they were assembled was shaken.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. Chapter five shows us that God was willing and jealous for his church and took away a couple who were trying to pretend that they were part of the program when they really weren't. The church in its mission, the church in its theology, the church in its profession and practice remained pure.

Again, in chapter five, it tells us, beginning of verse 14, believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of men and women. Even the sick were brought into the streets and laid on beds and couches, hoping that the shadow of Peter passing by might touch them and heal them. Amazing when you consider it, the power of God, the presence of God, the privilege of God, the praise of the people, a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities.

They came to Jerusalem and they brought the sick with them and those that were tormented by unclean spirits. And the scripture says in chapter five, verse 16, they were all healed, every last one of them. Again, chapter six shows us that men and women were being ordained to the ministry.

They were laying their hands upon them and they were being sent forth. And the word of God spread and a number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. And a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

That means those that were teaching the people in the temple, those that were known, I guess, as the religious elite were starting to turn because they saw the power of God. They saw the presence of God among this early church. But now in chapter eight, a persecution arises.

Seemingly out of nowhere, social appreciation of the church changes. And now that which was embraced by the multitudes now begins to be vilified. Now there's an anger against the church.

Now laws are not protecting the people of God. The freedom of religion as they would have known it for at least a short season was gone. Stephen, a young disciple, was stoned to death and there were no authorities stepping in to stop it.

There were no consequences to those who threw the stones and those who hated the testimony of God were now emboldened by what looked to be their apparent success. And it says, as for Saul in chapter eight, verse three, he made havoc of the church, entering every house and dragging off men and women and committing them to prison. These forces were invading even people's homes and following Jesus became a literal crime in that society.

I'll tell you folks, history does repeat itself. So best beware. Paul said of this day, when he's giving his own testimony in the book of Acts, chapter 26, verses 10 and 11, he says, this I also did in Jerusalem and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them and I punished them often in every synagogue.

I compelled them to blaspheme and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. When you think it couldn't get any worse, the saints in Jerusalem had to flee for their lives. They had to flee for their safety.

They, I can see people leaving behind what they had, taking their children and making a journey to whatever place they thought might be safe. But there's something interesting seems to happen here in chapter eight, verse four, it said, then those who were scattered, went everywhere preaching the word. There was an inner power in them that could not be conquered and inner resource, maybe that they knew nothing about until they found themselves in a place where society was no longer for them, where the protections were no longer there to protect them, where they had to rely on the one who in the beginning of the book of Acts gave them a promise and the promise that Jesus made to his early church and to you and I, he said, you will receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

Now, a question that came into my heart when I was studying this is this, do you suppose they had gotten so comfortable with their successes in Jerusalem that they forgot their calling? Do you suppose they may have forgotten the words of Jesus? I'm going to give you power and in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth, you're going to be witnesses of me. Now, all of these wonderful things that I read earlier about the early church all happened in Jerusalem, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, the miracles, the laying on of hands, the favor with the people, priests turning to the Lord, people's getting healed by somebody's shadow going, all of these things happened in Jerusalem. It's possible.

It's just a conjecture on my part, but I think they may have been reluctant to go deeper in the calling that was supposed to be theirs and would be supported by the power of God that would be given to them. It's truly amazing. Like, just like you and I in a society that where Christianity has been for decades, relatively accepted.

I remember even in the eighties and early nineties, remember how popular it was to be born again. If you were a born again athlete, that was okay. Born again, politician.

It didn't mean they were born again. That's why you need to be here at three o'clock and hear what that really is all about and what it means. But it was popular to be a Christian, popular to go to church, popular to say, I belong to Christ, kind of a carry over maybe of the Jesus movement that hit this country at one time.

But the reluctance in a sense to go forward, I can't help but wonder in our time of relative acceptance in this nation, have we been reluctant as a people, as a church age, have we been reluctant to go deeper than our own fellowships? We've been reluctant to go deeper than just the comfort and the blessing of being accepted by a society. If God's calling us to something deeper, maybe we've not been willing to hear him. And just maybe he has to do something to get us to hear him again.

It's not a bad thing folks. When persecution begins, because the church has always thrived when it's, when she's been persecuted, you have to understand that God will wake us up, whatever way he has, we

can, we can hang on to our pillow as long as we want, but God is persistent and he will wake us up. He will get ahold of us.

In chapter eight, verse five, it says, then Philip went down to the city of Samaria. And it doesn't, there's no mention of Samaria except from the lips of Jesus in Acts chapter one. We go through seven chapters and part way into chapter eight before anybody obeys the voice of Christ and actually goes to Samaria and does it because of the persecution.

And the Samaritans were not the religious elite. They were not the class that most people wanted to associate with. They were considered a mixed race people.

They were, they were, they were not pure Jews. They were shunned by that society. And ironically, it took a measure of persecution to get the church up and going to where she needed to go, to go to those who are marginalized and addicted and afflicted and forgotten by society and considered unworthy.

And when Philip went to the city of Samaria, it says multitudes with one accord, he did the thing spoken by Philip and seeing the miracles, which he did when, when you and I find ourselves where we're supposed to be, not where we are, but where we're supposed to be. I tell you the miracles of God begin to happen. Prison doors begin to open blinded eyes.

See wounded hearts are healed. The demonic powers that have been attached to people's lives, flee, freedom comes a new song comes into people's hearts, but it comes when we find ourselves where we're supposed to be. I don't know if there's a greater prayer that you and I can pray in this generation than that, which Paul prayed when he had an encounter with the living Christ.

What would you have me to do with a sincere heart and say, God, what would you have me to do? And I will continue pressing through to you. Show me what you will have me to do. I know a lady, a friend of mine that I met who prayed that.

And one of the trips I was on, she, she just started praying. She said, God, what would you have me to do? And she just kept praying until she got an answer. Her answer was go to Starbucks, sit down in her local town and open your Bible and just do that.

So she went to Starbucks. She sat down, she opened her Bible and she sat there thinking, have I really heard from God? Is it, is this really God? And that's the thing, you know, a lady, a stranger comes over and says, I see you reading your Bible and start sharing her struggles and your trials and the difficulty. She was able to open the scripture and encourage her.

Then another lady comes over and they start a Bible study with three. I don't know how many, by the time I got there, there might've been 30 or 40 ladies in that Bible study started by somebody who just said, Lord, what would you have me to do? What would you have me to do? And in verse eight, it says, and there was great joy, unclean spirits crying verse seven with a loud voice came out of many who were possessed and many were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city when Philip moved out and finally went to Samaria.

And then you go farther down. God speaks to Philip and says, now leave Samaria and go out into the desert. He simply obeyed God.

And when he went out into that desert, cause I think by this point he knew that when you follow where Christ is leading miracles begin to happen. And there was a man who was a servant to the queen of Ethiopia, coming back from Jerusalem, heading home, reading the book of the prophet Isaiah, reading Isaiah 53, unsure of who it spoke. Philip joined him in his chariot, led him to Christ, took him down to a pool of water and baptized him.

And this is the first record we have of the gospel of Jesus Christ going into Africa. It's amazing when we start obeying God, when we start doing what God calls us to do and great joy was in that city. And then in chapter nine, verses one to six, it says, Saul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord went to the high priest and asked letters to go to the synagogue of Damascus that if he found any of who are of the way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

As he journeyed, he came near Damascus and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And he said, who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you're persecuting. It's hard for you to kick against the goads.

In other words, Saul, it's hard for you, isn't it? To kick against those people that I have been using to show you that there's a better way to live. There's another purpose for life on the earth than the one that you have thought. There's an eternity to consider, Paul, and there's something I want to do through your life and you've been kicking against it.

That's why you've been so enraged against those who carry my presence within them. I want you to consider this. I believe Paul would not have been in this place at this time, had he not been persecuting the church.

Have you ever considered the fact that you might be the key to the very conversion of those who are pursuing you? You ever considered that God is after that evil boss through you? You are. The reason that person hates you the way they do is you are pricking their conscience. Your life is telling them there is a God.

There is a heaven. There is an eternity. There is such a thing as sin.

There is a cross. There is shed blood. There is forgiveness.

There is a new life in Christ. God's using you to prod their conscience towards him. And because they want to be God in themselves, there's a rage in their heart.

Have you considered that when it looks like you're actually losing, that you're actually winning? When it looks like you're losing, when all hell is broken out in your life, when persecution arises, when there's a scattering takes place, when lamentation is happening over the loss of certain freedoms and rights, when authorities are becoming so emboldened, they're even going into houses and dragging off men and women and committing them to prison, when people look to be scattered, when we can't get together the way we used to, when it looks like we're losing, have you ever considered the fact that we might actually be winning? Hebrews chapter 12, verse three says, consider him, that's Jesus, who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. Folks, didn't the cross seem like a defeat, like a loss? The pain, the rejection, the scorning, even the good motives of Christ, all being vilified, but wasn't the cross the ultimate victory in the history of the world? There's never been a

victory like it. The kingdom of God can sometimes seem like the ultimate irony.

In God's kingdom, the way up is down. James 4.10, humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up. The way to lasting provision in God's kingdom is to start giving things away.

Luke 6.38, give, and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your bosom. In God's kingdom, the pathway to joy travels through the valley of sorrow. Psalm 30, verse five, weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

Thank God. In God's kingdom, the way to live is to die. Matthew 16.25, Jesus said, whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

And last but not least, in God's kingdom, I have finally learned the way to winning is to appear to be losing. Now, you're clapping like you're not sure. It's sort of like a golf clap on steroids.

1974, one of the greatest heavyweight fights in all of history. One of the greatest boxers, arguably, ever to enter the sport. His name was Cassius Clayence, and he changed it to Muhammad Ali.

In 1974, he was facing an opponent that was bigger, was younger, he was stronger, and he punched like a powerhouse. In the natural, it looked like he was going to go down to defeat. And when the fight began, it actually looked like it was happening.

He backed into the ropes. Man, usually, you ever heard the saying, when you're on the ropes, that's a boxing saying, by the way. If anybody's not, I felt like I was on the ropes.

When you back into the ropes, you're just using the ropes as a backdrop to hold you up. It's like you're going down and there's nothing can keep you on your feet anymore. So he backed into the ropes, covered up his face, opened his elbows to make his midsection vulnerable, and let his opponent punch away for what seemed like an eternity.

Little did his opponent know that he had trained his midsection, his body, to take these. Instead of focusing before that fight on jabs and punching himself, he focused on strengthening his midsection so he could actually take the blows. And he went into the ropes, and I remember he put his arms up over his neck, and he let this man just punch him over and over and over again.

And when it looked like his head was down, and when it looked like the fight was over, I still remember it to this day. The commentator, he looked up and he was smiling. The commentator said, look at him.

He's smiling. He's smiling. And it was at the point when his opponent had exhausted himself.

He had punched so long and so hard, he had no strength left. Then he pushed him away with a smile on his face, and the rest is history. He knocked him out.

He won the heavyweight championship. He called it rope-a-dope, I don't know if you've ever heard of that. An unwitting opponent.

You see, here's my point. When the devil starts punching away at the church of Jesus Christ, we have an inner strength in the Holy Spirit. We have promises of God.

And the best favor that Satan can do to us in this church age, in this country, is to start punching away at the church, make us feel like we're on the ropes. And when we know we're on the ropes, then we understand, wow, I've got a strength I didn't know I had. I've got purpose I didn't know I had.

I've got an inner core that has been trained. You see, Christ has trained his body. This is the temple of the Holy Ghost.

The living God is inside these bodies. There is a strength inside of us that this world knows nothing about. We can be hit, and we can be hit, and we can be hit again, but no weapon formed against us can prosper.

And when we find ourselves on the ropes, that's when we find out what strength we really have. When all hell starts breaking out in the earth, that's why Jesus said, lift up your head and look for your redemption draws nigh. Don't lift it up with sorrow.

Lift it up with joy. Lift it up with a smile. Lift it up with an understanding.

I have power over all the works of darkness, and nothing shall by any means hurt me. I have power to pray, to move mountains. I have power to ask God for what I need, and he will give it to me.

I have the living God inside this earthen vessel. I think it's time to play rope-a-dope with the devil. Our prayer has to be, God, help me to see now from heaven's perspective that I'm not losing at all.

I'm not losing when I pray for my family. I'm not losing when I believe for my marriage. I'm not losing when I cry out for my kids.

I'm not losing. And in the work environment, even though it looks like I am, I'm not. The devil would have me believe that I'm on the ropes.

He'd have me believe that I'm not going to be able to stand. He'd have me believe that I'm going to go down. But I'm not losing, because in the kingdom of God, what appears to be losing is actually winning.

I'm following in the footsteps of the one who allowed himself to be crucified so that he could be raised from the dead by his Father, washed me clean of my sin, and indwelt me with his Holy Spirit, and caused me to stand. I'm indwelt by the one who defeated the powers of darkness, and the scripture says he made an open display of all their strength. He laid it out like a general did in those days when he conquered a foreign army.

He laid out all the weapons for everybody to see, that all of their weaponry did not give them the power to triumph over what was in his hand. You have that strength. I don't care who you are today.

If you have the living God dwelling in your earthen vessel, there's not a hand born under the heavens that has the power to take him down, and he lives inside of you, lives in the inner core of your being. God, help me to see my life from your perspective again. God, help me to see your hand in my situation.

God, help me anoint my eyes with eye salve that I might see. God, help me to see that there is no power that can triumph. There's no name that is named.

There's no wall that can be built. There's no trench that can be dug. There's nothing that can separate me from the love of God, which is mine in Christ Jesus.

Nothing can take away the victory of the cross from me. He may not answer your prayer the way you think it should be answered, and he will do what he has to do to get you and I to get up and get moving again, and go to where we need to be. And by God's grace, I believe that is happening in this generation.

When the devil punches away at the church, he is in fact strengthening her, and he's ensuring his own defeat. Thank God. Thank God.

The scripture tells us the secret of the Lord is revealed to those who fear him. Those who walk in right relationship with God, we begin to see something that people who walk by their own natural sight can't see. Praise be to God.

My brother, my sister, let me say it as clearly as I can. You're not losing. You're not losing.

You might feel like you're on the ropes, but I want to encourage you to lift your head and smile. Look the devil in the eye and say, yeah, maybe you can beat me, but you can't beat the one inside of me. I have somebody living inside of me who has bound the very honor of his name in keeping me on my feet.

And if I fall down, he lifts me up again. When I'm weak, he becomes my strength. He can't be defeated.

If you have Christ inside of you, you can't be defeated. You understand that? You can't be defeated. The Lord God allowed the church to be persecuted so she would fulfill her calling.

She went into all the world. She was told that she was going to do that. He allowed the persecution to begin to get her to get out of her comfort zone and move forward to what she was supposed to be doing.

You'd be amazed. You'd be amazed at what would happen here today. If you had the courage to pray, Lord, show me what I'm to do and put no limitations on God.

It can't be within the, you can't hold up all your certificates to him and say, look, look at my qualifications. Doesn't need any of it. None of it.

Doesn't want it. And most times he will put you where you're not strong. So you need him.

Thanks be to God. But I'm telling you, when you begin to flow in what he's got for your life, the miracles start to happen. Devils start to flee and great joy comes into places, into homes, into cities, towns, families, apartments, lives of kids.

You'd be amazed to have the courage, especially if you've found comfort in Jerusalem, especially if you've just found, and I don't blame you. New York's a hard city. You know, some folks you just scrape and scratch just to get here on Sunday, just to get a word to get you through the rest of the week.

And the thought of willfully going into more trouble and you come to church and say, I'm finally like, like I've got my apartment and I, I locked my door at five o'clock and I got my Bible and, and don't bother me. I come to church and I sing and I just, it's, I've finally found people who love me and I love them. And I'm just enjoying this so much.

Don't ask me to pray for something that's going to take me out of this. But you see God, because he loves you and he has a plan for your life, will allow somebody to come into your life that will make you pray. I've been there.

I've been there. I've been there. My prayers, I remember a couple of times in my life were just so sweet.

Oh Lord, I love you. And, and then finally in the middle of the prayers, what, what, what are you trying to tell me? Because it just doesn't go away. And it just, you're trying to push it out.

You're trying to make nice music in your heart and it just doesn't go away. And then finally, the Lord says, I want you to do this. And every time I've obeyed him, the miraculous has happened.

We, we try and want to live our lives in comfort. And I understand that we're all the same, but as a church age, we're being pushed out of Jerusalem. I hope you understand that religious freedom is being lost and persecution is beginning.

It's going to get a lot worse, but it's not losing. We're winning. So I'm going to give an altar call this morning.

It's very, very simple. Lord, give me strength. Give me the strength, Lord, to endure.

Give me the strength to see victory. I've looked down so long. I don't see the victory anymore.

I've been battered so long. I've forgotten that I have that one who created the universe living inside of me. And so Lord, I'm just presenting myself to you and I'm just saying, God, would you please give me strength? And would you make me aware of my strength that you've given me? And would you give me eyes to see the victory? Would you, would you take me out of, of hanging my head in sorrow week after week and day after day and just seeing no divine purpose in anything I'm going through? Would you just lift my head and open my eyes and would you let me see your strength in me again? And it's a simple prayer, but God will answer it.

And you can go out and say in your heart, I'm not losing. I'm actually winning. I just didn't see it the way God works.

I thought it had to be this way. I didn't realize the kingdom of God is quite the opposite most times. And so Lord, thank you just for opening my eyes again.

Thank you for giving me the assurance. The devil's not going to take me down no matter how much he pounds at me. I'm not going to go down.

I'm not giving up my song. I'm not going to lose my victory. I'm not surrendering my family by God's grace.

I'm going to win. We're going to stand. We're going to worship for a few moments, but if the Lord's drawing you and you feel coming to this altar would mean something to you, I'm going to invite you to come and you can stand between the screens, please, in the annex in North Jersey as well as at home.

Let's worship for a few moments, and then we're going to pray together and believe God for an eye salve anointing. Now, those that have come to the altar and those that have done something similar in your heart today, I want you to listen to me. The people who went out in the book of Acts, they were not superheroes of the faith.

They were ordinary people like you and me. They had their struggles. They had their fears.

They had their trials, but when they went out, the miraculous began to flow, and ultimately, if you know history, even Rome, mighty Rome bent its knee to Christ. Eventually, the gospel went into all the world, and that's why the gospel is here in New York this morning. It was because of these people, and when you and I set out to obey God, you'd be amazed how many people will end up in the kingdom of God because of that obedience.

Years ago, I'll only take a couple of minutes to tell you this story, but years ago, probably, I don't know how many, but several years ago, my daughter Kate was in our apartment here in the city, and she was alone, and she was praying. She said, God, you speak to my dad, and you speak to my mom, and they've known all these miracles in their life, but do you speak to other people, and would you speak to me? And so she began to pray, and she had an impression come into her heart. Go to Columbus Circle and sit on a particular bench, and she thought, well, on the off chance this is God speaking to me, I'm going to do it.

So she left the apartment. She went to Columbus Circle, and she sat on the bench, and she just waited, waited for 15, 20, 25 minutes, and sat there and thought, this is nuts. I mean, this is not God.

It was me trying to invent the voice of God. This is ridiculous. So she was about to get up and go when a young girl about 19 years old or so came and sat down beside her on the bench.

The young girl turns to her and says, what are you doing here tonight? She said, well, I know this sounds like it's nuts, but I was in prayer, and I was asking God if he speaks to people, and I felt like he told me to come and sit on this bench, so here I am. She said, so what brings you here? She said, the girl said, well, I've lost my boyfriend, and I really have no reason to live, and I gave God one chance tonight to prove to me he's real. She said, if he didn't prove to me he's real, I was going to commit suicide.

So obviously she had a chance to share Christ with her and pray. So when we start moving out and just doing what God asks us to do, it's not like the church started with superheroes and is ending with us. Our theme is it's down to this.

They were like you are, people with families and struggles and fears and trials and unemployed in some cases. They were everything that we are, but they just went out and believed that they had been empowered by God to make a difference, and because of them we are here. Do you understand that? If they didn't go, we wouldn't be here.

The gospel would still be in Jerusalem, but they went, and so the commission is now given to us to follow in their footsteps and just say, Lord, what would you have me to do? It's that simple. What would you have me to do? And just do that. Don't try to make it too spiritual.

Don't make it too deep. Just let God speak, and he will. It comes as a strong impression in your heart to do something, and you head out and begin to do that.

That's where it all begins, and Father, I just thank you, Lord, for these men and women that you brought to this altar and those that are yielding in their homes in North Jersey in the annex today. Father, in Jesus' name, I just want to thank you, Lord, that we are your church, and you're not ashamed of us. You're proud of us as your people.

You are delighted that we are here to represent you in our towns, our cities, and wherever we go, and so, Lord God, we're asking you today to lift our heads, lift our hearts, make us aware of our strength, make us aware of our calling, and guide us forward into this generation of people filled with joy, of people filled with

life, of people with a song that can't be taken away or denied. God Almighty, I thank you for what a great opportunity you've given us to let your light shine through your church at this time. Thank you for the knowledge, Lord, that you don't choose the strong, and you don't choose, Lord, those who are influential or wealthy.

God, you choose the weak and foolish and the nobodies and the nothings as you tell us in your word that you do, and so, Lord, we thank you, God, that we qualify to be used by you in this generation for your glory. Thank you, Lord, for showing us today that even though it looks like we might be losing, we're actually winning. I bless you, God, for that knowledge.

Put that before our faces for the rest of our days so that we can go through the valley of the shadow of death, that we can believe that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives. I thank you for it, God, with all my heart. I ask you to bless this church, God.

Bless us with strength. Bless us with spiritual vigor. Bless us, God, with joy that can't be taken away by our circumstances.

Bless us with spiritual eyes to see what's of real value. God, I wonder how many could see the apostle Paul and the great man of God he was going to become, and that his words would lead millions and millions into the kingdom of God. I wonder if they could see that though they appeared to be losing, they were winning.

God, help us today. Help us, Lord, to have heaven's eyes, and I thank you for it in Jesus' name. Amen and amen.

you

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