

Keep the Lamps Burning

by Carter Conlon

The sermon emphasizes the importance of keeping the lamps burning, or remaining passionate and devoted to God's work, in order to avoid losing our first love for God and becoming passionless and joyless in our faith.

Duration: 47:34

Scripture: Revelation 2:1

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "Faithful Obedience"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of overcoming spiritual lethargy and complacency, urging believers to keep their spiritual lamps burning bright. It calls for a renewal of passion and dedication to God's work, highlighting the need to overcome personal compromise and maintain a fervent love for Christ. The message encourages a deep commitment to prayer, active participation in God's work, and a willingness to overcome inner struggles to fulfill God's calling.

Transcript

I thank God for the great, great privilege of being involved in his work, and it has been the fuel source of Pastor Tresa's life and my life. It has been our joy. It's our life.

It's everything that we are, and I do thank God with all my heart that the Lord's going to give us the strength, and that's my message this morning. It's simply called, Keep the Lamps Burning. Keep the Lamps Burning.

It's a message for everybody, and if you're visiting today, it applies to you as well, but it's also for this church, for Times Square Church as well, and for those online as well who feel that you are part of this church. I had another message I was working on on Thursday of this week, and the Lord just took it away from me, just completely removed it from me, and Friday morning, I woke up, and we prayed together, a few of us, and he gave me this word, and it's really a New Year's message, if I may call it that, before Christmas. Keep the Lamps Burning, but in obedience to God, I'll speak this, but I speak it to you as a pastor who is deeply proud of you.

I'm deeply proud of you, the music ministry, the elders, the pastors of this church. I want you to know that. Keep the Lamps Burning.

Revelation Chapter 2, please, if you go there with me. Revelation Chapter 2. Now, Father, I thank you, God, with all my heart today, for how faithful you have been to us as a people. You have kept us.

You have blessed us, Lord. You have empowered us. You've equipped us.

You've been everything and all. You are the one who walks the testimony of this church, and it's been your presence that has made the difference. We recognize, Lord, that without you, we have nothing.

We just have knowledge, and it leads us away from you. God, I ask you, Lord, that you would give me the ability to share this from my heart, as if you yourself were standing in this pulpit speaking to us as a congregation, as people online, as visitors today who are being given the great, great privilege of carrying the testimony of your life and your redemption into this coming generation. Help us, Lord God, as a people.

Oh, Jesus Christ, I appeal to you with all my heart that you would help us as a church to go into the next season that you've ordained for us, alive, filled with your spirit, empowered, emboldened, enlivened to do the work that you've called us to do. Lord, we yield to you, and we acknowledge that without you, we have absolutely nothing, only knowledge without power. It's only you, Lord, that gives us light and life.

Father, help us. Help us, Lord, to be as bold this coming year as we were yesterday in the streets. Help us to be as alive this coming year as we were yesterday in the streets.

Help us to sing, oh God, in this coming year as we did this morning. Help our hearts to be glad at your presence, and let there be no sacrifice too great for your kingdom. Deliver us, oh God, from everything that would put us to sleep and take away your life and your testimony.

I thank you for it with all my heart. I praise you in Jesus' name. Revelation chapter 2, begin to read at verse 1. To the angel of the church of Ephesus, and the word angel means messenger, as Pastor David used to say it, to the pastor of the church of Ephesus, write, these things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. And you have persevered and have patience and have labored for my name's sake and have not become weary.

Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen. Repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give to each of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Many, many years ago, a great evangelist, his name was D.L. Moody, and at one of his meetings in America, he related the story of a shipwreck on a dark and tempestuous night, when not even a star was visible. A ship was approaching the harbor of Cleveland with a pilot on board. The captain, noticing only one light as they drew nearer, that of the lighthouse, asked the pilot if he was quite sure that it was Cleveland Harbor, as other lights should have been burning at the harbor mouth, in other words, there were lights that would be lit all the way in a channel into that harbor of safety.

The pilot replied that he was quite sure, whereupon the captain inquired, where are the lower lights? Gone out, replied the pilot. Can you make the harbor then, asked the captain, to which the pilot answered, we must, sir, or we perish. Bravely, the old man steered the vessel upon her course toward safety, but alas, in the darkness of the harbor mouth, he missed the channel.

The ship struck upon many rocks, and in the stormy waters, many lives were lost. Then Moody made his appeal to his audience, brothers, the master will take care of the great lighthouse, but let us keep the lower lights burning. Among Moody's hearers that evening was Mr. Philip Bliss, a well-known hymn writer, and the striking story had once suggested to him one of his most popular hymns.

It was sang in many revival services for many years. It's called Let the Lower Lights Be Burning. I'd like to sing it for you this morning, and I believe that the words will also be on the screen, that you can look at it yourself, and maybe even sing along.

Brightly beams our father's mercy from his lighthouse evermore. But to us, he gives the keeping of the lights along the shore. Let the lower lights be burning.

Send a gleam across the wave. Some poor fainting struggling seaman you may rescue, you may save. Dark the night of sin has settled.

Loud the angry billows roar. Eager souls are waiting, watching for the lights along the shore. Let the lower lights be burning.

Send a gleam across the waves. Some poor fainting struggling seaman you may rescue, you may save. Trim your feeble lamp, my brother.

Some poor sailor tempest tossed, trying now to make a harbor in the darkness may be lost. Let the lower lights be burning. Send a gleam across the wave.

Some poor fainting struggling seaman you may rescue. You may sing it with me now. Let the lower lights be burning.

Send a gleam across the wave. Some poor fainting struggling seaman you may rescue, you may save. These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.

This is a message to a particular group of believers from the one who is and has been the source of their life, their strength, and whose presence, whose presence alone has been in reality their testimony. This is a message from the one who loves you with an everlasting love, who has a passion in his heart for you, who has a purpose in his heart for your life, for mine individually and collectively as a body in this generation. And verse two tells us that they had a, just as we have, they had based their fellowship around the love of what is true.

It says, I know your labor, your patience, you cannot bear those who are evil and you've tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and I've found them liars. And if you were to say, if there's one particular characteristic among others, obviously, but that rises from this pulpit and in this house is that in the 29 years that this church has been in existence, there has been a love of truth. There's been an examining of truth.

There's, there's been something in this house that is where the Lord has given us the power not to turn away from the hard things of scripture, not to try to make it palatable to a backslidden generation. And we have tested and proven, and we preach from the word of God in this house. And we challenge you to check it out for yourself and make sure it's true.

We ask you not to be lazy. You don't accept at face value anything until you see it in the word of God for yourself and God's Holy spirit speaks it to you. You have to be, we have to be a discerning people in these last hours of time, because there are going to be many that lead the body of Christ astray by their fluff and their visions that they purport to have.

No, our, the revelation of Christ is complete in the scripture and everything that's spoken in this pulpit has to be provable by the word of God. You have to be able to see it. You have to be able to see the character of God in it, the way God has dealt with past nations and situations.

You have to see the mercy of God and the justice of God as well. And he goes on to say, you've persevered and you have patience and you've labored for my name's sake and not become weary. You know, yesterday I saw it on the street that we've not become weary as a church.

I thank God for that with all my heart. It's been quite a history in Times Square church over the last 29 years, we're going into our 30th year. We will hit our 30th anniversary in October 7th of this coming year.

Since 1987, when this church was established, we have had over 7,000 church services where we have gathered together to worship God. And how glorious has that been? The presence of the Lord has always been here with us. These altars have always been full.

We have baptized thousands of people who have come to Christ in this church from not only around New York city, but visit us from all around the world. It's been amazing to be in a place where God's presence is. I don't want to be anywhere else.

I don't want to be in any other place, but where God is and what God has called me to do and to be. I thank God. I don't take this for granted in the morning.

That's why I come in early to pray. So I get up early on Sunday morning. That's why I pray at home.

I come into the apartment. I change. I come down here.

I pray. I come on the platform. I pray.

I don't take his presence for granted. Praise be to God. Since 2001, we've sent 3,700 people on 312 short term missions trips to 56 countries around the world.

We've had seven international outreaches and we've seen God do the miraculous. We've seen poverty and violence, broken civil war stopped. We've seen God do the miraculous in these international outreaches around the world.

In the last eight years, we have served 11 million meals to hungry children through the ministry in this church called Child Cry. Thank God. What a wonderful outreach that has been.

In the last four years, since we were led of the Lord to initiate a program called Feed New York, where we are underwriting a hundred churches in the inner city, particularly to feed the people in their communities.

And by the way, many of those pastors have been encouraged. Their churches are growing.

In the last four years, we've given 2 million pounds of food to a hundred churches in the inner city of New York City to feed the poor in their community. At present, there are 1,240 people who participate in 70 ministries in this church. Thank God for that.

With all my heart, our prison ministry, which began 20 years ago, has visited more than 72,000 inmates in prison. Thank God for the prison ministry. And I'm only scratching the surface of what the Lord has done here.

I'm not counting in the numbers of trips that the raven ministry have taken out feeding people on the street corners that might not have anything to eat. The number of blankets we've distributed to people who are stuck sleeping in the cold in the wintertime. I can't tell you how proud I am of this church.

My heart is brimming because many, if not all in this church have taken the mantle and the responsibility of letting Christ honor his own name through us. You've taken it seriously in these last 29 years. Nevertheless, this is what God speaks to the church of Ephesus.

And this is where we are headed. We're in a nevertheless moment. You know, folks, we've been in revival really for almost 30 years now.

I don't know if you really understand how dangerous this moment is for us as a church, because there's, I don't know if there's ever been a church stay in revival as long, the presence of God being with us as long and the grave danger we face of taking for granted his presence in our lives, our ministries, in our fellowship. He says to the church of Ephesus, nevertheless, I have this against you that you have left. You have left your first love.

It's not that he said, when you look at this church in the first few verses, they should be getting an award for something. But Jesus looks at them because he's the one who's been their life source. He's the one who has been that glorious presence of God in their midst.

And he says, nevertheless, I have this against you. You have left your first love. It's not you're leaving or you're thinking about leaving.

You already have left. It's like the person in the workplace who's, you were so excited about your job when you first got it, but you you've left it. You've still at your desk.

You still check in at nine. You still check out at five, but you left the job long ago. It's no longer a calling.

There's no longer any sense of fulfillment in it. It's like the person in a marriage. You, you spoke great sweet words at that altar and you talked about how your love was going to be enduring, but you have left long ago.

You're still at the dinner table, but you long ago left. You have left your first love. It's when you and I start coming to God's house and we're engaged in God's work, but it simply becomes repetition without passion.

God forbid, God forbid that should ever be our portion in this house. God forbid. I prayed in prayer last week.

I said, Lord, if that ever gets into my heart, take me out of this pulpit, take me out of this church for your namesake and for your people's sake. God forbid that it should become a passionless repetition, just a program to come to this, just a program to get a word from God, just a program to come to prayer, just a program to share the name of Jesus, just repetition without passion. And that is the dilemma of the human condition.

Satan got bored with what he was given of God to do. He got bored with it and he wanted something different. He had an exalted position in the heavens.

He was the anointed cherub, but he got bored with it and he decided he wanted something different. And he sold that in the human heart. That's why we have a tendency to become bored with the familiar.

We become bored with reading our Bibles in the morning. We become bored with going to prayer. We become even bored with living for God.

Look what happened to Solomon. He was given the charge of God to guard the only visible light there was in the world at that time. Behind that curtain was the glory of God, so bright, so brilliant, so beautiful that if you step behind that curtain with any sin in your life, you died in the presence of God was so holy.

And he was given the charge of guarding that light, guarding that testimony. And for 23 years he did so. And he did so, I'm sure, with a fervent heart.

I can envision Solomon coming into the temple in the morning and glorifying God as he once had done on a scaffold on his knees with his hands raised, realizing that the whole purpose of God in being that one spot on the earth was to bring reputation to his own name through his people. Or given the charge of guarding that temple. I can see Solomon coming in and over the years just becoming so familiar with the carved works that were done by the hand of God, with the gold that was everywhere, that really spoke of the wealth, the treasure, the riches of God's mercy.

Everything spoke of God. And Solomon was given this incredible gifting of God. It wasn't the wisdom of his own.

God gave him what he had. God gave you what you have today. God gave you a sound mind.

God gave you the passion to reach out. God gave you the love that's in your heart. God gave you vision, focus, everything you have.

God gave it to you. Solomon would come into the house of God, I'm sure, every day. And then he got bored with the familiar.

Can you imagine? How could you get bored? How could you get bored with the guardianship of the presence of God in the earth? But he did. And he took the giftings that God had given him, and he began to do other things with them. Began to plant vineyards and raise cattle.

He did aqueducts. He did actually quite significant gardens. I'm sure they were beautiful.

But you see, that's not what he was called to do. He wasn't called to do that. He wasn't called to... He raised up choirs.

He wasn't called to raise up choirs. He wasn't called to build aqueducts and falls and plant vineyards and raise cattle. He wasn't called.

It's not why the gifting of God was given him. But he got bored with the familiar. And he passed on the temple to a very weak son, Rehoboam, who divided the nation and set the stage for the subsequent swallowing of the testimony of God in the earth.

God forbid that you and I should pass on a weak church to the next generation. God forbid that I heard yesterday that four teenagers out on the street, four teenagers at the manger scene, had never heard this message ever in their life. And a man standing next to them led the four of them in the sinner's prayer, led them to Christ yesterday on the street.

They might be here this morning, and my question to the rest of us is what kind of a church are we going to leave for them? What kind of a house is this going to be? What are they going to see when they look at you and I? Do we have any zeal left in our hearts? And I say this with sadness in my heart. I really do. But years ago, as a new believer in Christ, Pastor Teresa and I began to attend the church where we got saved.

And I had such a passion in my heart forming for God. And I had a question arose in my heart. And I said, Oh God, if I give you my whole heart, what will I look like at 65? I was 25 or so at the time.

And I looked on the platform of that church. And I remember saying, God forbid that I should look like those men. I meant it.

I meant it folks. If this is what I'm going to look like at 65, whatever journey they took, I don't want it. They were joyless.

They were passionless. I was in the church two years, never met one of them. They take off to Florida for the winter and then come back in the spring and be all in the knot.

If the church got into some kind of revival, having to draw it back down into their standard, as they called it, of holiness. I don't want to stand as a judge, but may God help me never to go there. I verse five, the Lord says, remember from where you've fallen.

Remember, remember, think back folks. I remember when I first felt God stir me to do something for his glory or to allow him to do something. I went out and offered to rent this little church in the middle of nowhere.

I'm not kidding you. There were two houses in the area where this church was, but I somehow felt God leading me to start a Bible study for the community. And I started to see heaven open.

They gave it the church to me for free to use, even provided a caretaker to shovel the snow and to light the, it was oil, oil burners. Many are not familiar with this, but it was an old country church. And then I got a call from a Bible association saying, the gentleman said, your name came into my mind.

And we just cleaned out a whole hull of the inn of Bibles and we're putting new ones in. And I've got my whole garage is full of Bibles. I've been praying about what to do with them.

And your name came into my mind. Do you need them? I said, well, boy, do I ever, I had nobody coming yet, but I, by faith, I felt God, you're opening the door. I'm going to take this truckload of Bibles, which is

what it was.

It was a truckload of Bibles. I remember we, I printed up a brochure about a Bible study, starting an opportunity for a changed life. And, uh, I had it distributed in general mail.

I don't know to how many homes, maybe a couple of thousand homes in the immediate area. And I remember the first night, a snowstorm hit and we drove there and it was myself, my brother-in-law and my son, Jason, who was about six years old at the time. And nobody came.

No, it was only the three of us. Nobody showed up. And so the question arose, do we go home? Do we pack it in? And I said, no, no, because there was a sense in my heart that God had called me to do this.

And it was for a reason higher than I could understand. There was a, a stirring inside that I have to be faithful to what God has called me. And it was a joy to be faithful.

So we worshiped as if there was a thousand, it wouldn't fit a thousand people, but we worshiped as if the house was full. And then my son, Jason shared his testimony at six years old to me and to my brother-in-law. It was awesome, but we stayed with it.

You see, the point is you don't have to have anything on the outside, but you really need something on the inside to cause you to know that you're in the will of God. That Bible study eventually grew and it turned into a church in an area that hadn't had a Christian testimony for a hundred years, as far as we knew. And later on, we, in another town, we bought an old abandoned church, Christian church building for a dollar.

And we began to rebuild it. We began to work day after day and we were tired. It was, it was laborious work.

There was a lot of sanding. There was a lot of painting. There was a lot of fixing.

It had been abandoned for over 30 years. We were tired. And I found myself pushing against the urge to slow down or quit altogether.

There were there, we started out, you know, every building project starts that way. You start out with great zeal and a lot of people. And then suddenly the zeal dies and the people stop coming because it's just always, it's not convenient.

Some get overwhelmed by the, the amount of work that had to be done, but yet I didn't allow it to happen because I had a deep inner sense that this work was leading to something higher and more important than I can understand. And by the grace of God, it was by the grace of God. It has folks.

There comes a time when you have to overcome that thought in your heart. What's the use? Where am I going? What's this all producing? You have to overcome that thought in your heart and let the Holy spirit stir you. Even if by faith, you begin to believe there's something bigger than what I can see than what I can understand ahead.

And in that church, people came, they came from a hundred mile radius of glory of God was in that little building. Many people were called into ministry who are still in ministry today. Almost the whole congregation would tell me because we've had an opportunity to get together over the years.

That was the defining moment in our lives as Christians and believers in Christ. It is the moment where we chose to walk with God in spite of how we feel or think. And folks, I feel the same way today in this church.

We've come 29 years. God has blessed us. And now we've got to push through that final veil, that final barrier, that sense of what we've we've been here.

We've done this. No, there's something deeper ahead. Do you understand there's something bigger than you and I can understand.

God has given us a prayer meeting that is live in 160, 175 countries in the world today. There's never been anything like it in the history of the Christian church, as far as I understand it or know about it. Do you understand that God's doing something bigger than us? This is not the time to go home.

This is not the time to draw back. This is not the time. If ever there was a time to press through, if ever there was a time to push through that veil of lethargy that wants to get into our hearts and say, God, I'm going to pray because there's something bigger ahead of us than what I realized.

Thank you for the past, but we're not living in the past. The past is past. We're living today and for tomorrow.

We're living for this generation that are headed into an eternity without God. And we have been given an opportunity to make a difference for them as a congregation. And the only thing that could stop this work is the lethargy of my own heart.

I have to trust God to stir my heart as much as you have to trust him to stir yours. There's a lot of things I could have been doing yesterday, but I chose to come to the house of God. A lot of things I could be doing today.

A lot of preachers my age are already in their rocking chairs in Florida. Verse five continued. He said, remember from where you fall and repent and do the first works or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place.

You see, I'll take your testimony from you. Our testimony is the presence of Christ. The removal of the lampstand is if we lose his presence, we've lost it all.

It doesn't matter how beautiful this building is. When Solomon lost the presence of God, it didn't matter how beautiful the temple was. Carved works meant nothing anymore.

His presence was gone. I'll take away your testimony. Do you understand that we have a testimony that's worldwide right now? Do you know that this service is on television in Europe? Hello in Germany.

Hello in Austria and Switzerland, Finland, France. Do you know they're watching me live in Europe right now? On television, there's a ticker tape on the bottom that translates it automatically into the other languages of countries it's going through. Do you recognize what God is doing in this church? He is in a sense made it the lighthouse that God promised Pastor David it would be.

This is a dark time. The beam is going farther and farther as it gets darker and darker. We're on national radio now and 600 and something stations in 39 states, soon to be nationwide, a half-hour program that's going to be called a call to the nation.

Our survival now depends on revival. That's the tagline of the radio program. Every Sunday morning message, the one that you're hearing today is going to be brought down to 28 minutes and is going to go right across the nation during the week.

God has turned the light on, but it's not about us. It's about him. Now, here's my question.

What if all of Europe comes in? We have a huge contingency from Australia that watch these services, the West Coast, California, all over this country. What if the people come in and you're not here? What if they come into our prayer meeting and half the seats are empty? Because we chose to stay home for convenience sake. No, this is not the time.

This is not the time to draw away from the work of God. This is the time to draw into the work of God because we have been given a specific calling of the Lord as a congregation. I don't want to lose the testimony of Christ in my life or in this church.

And by God's grace, we won't. Because I hope in my heart and believe that you can hear what the Lord is speaking this morning. This is not a time to draw back.

It's not a time to build vineyards. It's not a time to do other things. This is a time to press in because the future of this nation may depend on what we do, as well as others like us that God is calling to pray.

We're not the only game in town, folks. There's many others. As in Elijah's day, there were 7,000 others that hadn't bent their knee to the spirit of that age.

But this you have, he says, you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Now, it's interesting that he infuses that after all of this. You know, the Nicolaitans were people that taught that grace allows you to live in immorality.

That you can be an adulterer, you can be in some kind of relationship that God says is an abomination. You can do all of these things and somehow grace covers it all. And he says, you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

In other words, you hate compromise. You still have that. But the question now is, do you hate the compromise in your own heart as much as you hate perhaps the behaviors of others or the opening of the doors of the Christian church to the redefining of marriage, which can't be redefined.

You can't redefine what God has defined. You can only create a lie and hope it's true. But do you hate the compromise in your own heart? Do you hate the fact that you'd rather sleep than pray? Do you hate the fact, you know, how many here used to, you know, there's people in this church who used to used to live to come to this house.

Now you live to come Sunday morning. Or maybe one service, maybe Sunday night, the odd Tuesday. I'm asking you as your pastor, and I have to have the right to ask you, is there something in your heart that needs to be overcome? Is there a spiritual laziness getting into your heart that needs to be retouched by the presence of God? He who has an ear, verse 7 says, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes. To him who overcomes. There's a point in your life and in mine where we have to overcome the laziness of our own heart.

We have to overcome the inner desires of the fallen nature that want God but everything else at the same time. We have to overcome the discouragement that wants to settle in and say, well, what's the point of all of this anyway? Why should I be doing this? We have to overcome it. To him who overcomes, I'll give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

In other words, if you are willing to overcome the compromise that's eating your present and threatening your future, if you do, I will give you access to spiritual life that can never be taken away from you. Praise be to God. Praise be to God.

Thank you, Lord. You know, Pastor Teresa and I have been 50% apart, 50% of the year for this going on our seventh year now. And quite often, she will cry when she has to leave to drive out to Summit.

I will cry when I have to leave to Summit to go back to New York. We don't really like being apart. This is not how we envisioned our golden years after 39 years of marriage.

But I always sort of hear it's better than if you cry when I arrive. But folks, this is what we're called to do. This is where life comes from.

This is who we are in Christ. You see, I'm going to stand before God soon. I'm 63 now.

I don't know how long I've got. I'll be 80 in 17 years. Can you imagine? I'm going to stand before God soon.

And his is the only voice that matters on that day. A billion people could say, wow, what a great man of God he was. Or they could say the other side.

I don't really. But none of their voices matter. The critics don't matter.

The people who praise me don't matter. Only one voice, only one voice matters. And that's the voice that will look me in the eye and say, well done.

He can't say it if it wasn't. He can't lie. He can't skirt the issue.

He can't say, well, we'll give this guy a break. It has to be well done for him to say well done. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Well, I have to be good and I have to be faithful for him to say it. You have been faithful over a few things. Behold, I will make you ruler over many things.

Enter into the joy of your Lord. I live for that voice. I live now for that voice, that voice that I'm going to hear just a few years down the road from now.

One day I'm going to be absent from this body. I'm going to be present with the Lord. And that's the only voice I care to please now.

That's the voice. He won't say well done if it wasn't well done. And so I've determined in my heart to stay alive spiritually.

I've determined in my heart to press through as I've always had to press through the lethargy of my own heart, the desire to stay home and rest. I'm going to serve God. My wife is going to serve God.

Our children are going to serve God. Our grandchildren are going to serve God by the grace of almighty God. Hallelujah.

I'm going to be 65 soon and I don't look like those guys on the platform. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, God. You have every opportunity to live in him.

You have every opportunity to have your lamp filled with oil. You have every opportunity. All you have to do is say, God, give me the grace to overcome my own heart.

Give me the grace to overcome my own thoughts, my own will, my own desires. The things that I think will make me happier, fulfill me. God, give me the grace.

When you get to be my age, it's your prayers go sitting. You'll get over the aches and pains in the morning when I get up. Getting on a bed and walking straight is a seven step journey now.

Give me the grace, Lord. Give me the grace. Oh, God, give me the grace.

You can be alive at the end of the journey. You can bring a multitude into the kingdom of God with you. Your prayers can touch heaven and move the hand of God.

But as with everything else, the choice is yours. It's mine. God will not make it for you.

He will not force you to go to prayer. He will not force you to be engaged with the work of God. He will not force you to love him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, but he will invite you.

And he says, if you can overcome this lethargy of your own heart, I'll give you something to eat off that will give you life all of your days, give you eyes to see what ordinary people can't see. It will give you words to speak that ordinary people can't speak. Give you a heart that ordinary people don't have.

Give you the ability to spend your whole day out in the cold and enjoy yourself. Praise God. To he who overcomes, to she who overcomes, I'll give you the right to eat of that tree of life.

May God give us the grace. See, we're going into 2017. This is going to be our 30th year.

It's a decision point for us. Do we live on the history of the past, or do we go into the future? I say, let's go into the future burning bright, alive in God. Let's let our prayer meetings lift the roof off of this house.

When people come in from around the world, they'll see what prayer looks like. Let's invite people to church. Let's get involved in the work of God.

Let's not just be casual observers of the work of God, but let's be participants in the work of God. Every one of us, give us the grace to open our mouths. Father, I thank you, Lord, that I know that I have delivered your heart.

There's nothing more I can say. There's nothing more I can do, but I ask you, Lord, to give us all, as your people, the grace to respond, that these lower lights will be burning, that people can find you as Lord and Savior, that churches will be strengthened, and God, that we will fulfill the full calling of this church in the days ahead. That which you've called us to be, where you've called us to go, God, we will fulfill it.

I ask you, Lord, for the grace not to fall short of what you've called my life to be. I ask you for your people, Lord. God, I know the depth of your love for every person here, and it ought to be love that draws us, not condemnation.

I pray, Lord Jesus Christ, that we would just, with sense, realize that serving you is the greatest work that life has been given. Help us, Lord God. Give us grace.

Give us strength. I pray for our friends that are visiting from other churches, other countries. I pray for those online from other places, Lord, that the same thing would be everyone's portion, that we would be found burning bright in this coming year.

Let this be the year that our lights burn again. Father, we thank you for it. In Jesus' name.

Praise God. I want to give an altar call this morning here at home in our online fellowships. You know, folks, did you know we have 500 online fellowships now? People that are with us this morning from all over the country.

Some are as small as two, and others are as big as 20, 25. God bless you, all of the online fellowships. I'm going to ask for those who with me would agree, with me would agree.

God, I have to overcome. I have to overcome my own heart. I have to overcome my own desires, my own will.

But you said that if I would move in that direction, you would give me strength that only heaven can provide. So God, I ask you for that strength this morning. And if that's the honest cry of your heart, the honest cry, because it will move to action.

It won't just allow you to dump conviction here in front of this platform, but it will actually move you and I to action in the house of God. You know, Pastor Teresa and I, because of the work of God, we missed our anniversary yesterday, but we've never been more in love or happier in our entire lives. I could have used our anniversary as an excuse not to be here, but you see, I'd rather be nowhere and neither would she than in the house of God and serving God's people.

That's what we're called to do. Thank God. Thank God.

Thank God. Let's stand. We'll worship for a moment.

If God's speaking to you, just come and we're going to pray together for this church, for you, for this church. Just slip out of your seats, balcony, main sanctuary and the annex. Just come join me here as a church, as a church, and we're going to pray together and believe God.

Let the lower lights be burning. We have so many reasons to be happy this morning. We have Christ in us, the hope of glory.

Christ in us is not offended if we have faltered, if we've drawn back. He's not offended. He draws us.

He draws us with an ever the last moment. Hear me on this. That's all he says.

Just hear me on this thing. And when we fight through the strangeness of our own heart and we get back engaged with the work of God, you see, he wouldn't have said, come back to your first love if it wasn't

possible. No, he says, I'll give you the supply.

You just make the journey. I'll give you the supply. Thank God.

Thank God. I've had in my heart that this is going to be the most wonderful Christmas for a lot of people. So special, not judged by what we heard today, what is on the outside, but because what Jesus wants to do in us on the inside to increase our faith, to help us understand how much he loves us and not be defeated by needing to overcome things within us, because he is more than able and he is more than willing.

And he will continually draw us if we but let him. And I think this is this Christmas of letting him. And so I just thank God for this message this morning, how moving and how profound.

I thank God for his abiding presence in this place, but then the hope that he goes with us. Emmanuel, God with us. And so I just want to say on behalf of Pastor Patrick, Pastor William, Pastor David and myself, we wish you a very, very Merry Christmas.

And Pastor Carter, we say we love you and thank you for leading us so well to the heart of God. Oh, God. Lord, thank you for loving us.

Thank you for drawing us. Thank you, Lord, that it is you who doesn't want this testimony to burn any less brightly, but even more so as the days grow darker. Thank you, Lord, for great grace, great love, great hope and a great future.

Thank you, Lord, for every heart that's open to you today. And you'll give us the strength to be the people you've called us to be. We bless you for it with all of our heart today.

And we thank you in Jesus name. Praise God.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28183.mp3>

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