

CARRY ON WAYWARD SON (Inspired by the Kansas Song)

Final Week of a 7-Week "Songs of Life" Series

Rev. Richard Maraj

Sunday, June 8, 2025

LYRICS to "Carry On Wayward Son"

Carry on my wayward son

There'll be peace when you are done

Lay your weary head to rest

Don't you cry no more

Once I rose above the noise and confusion

Just to get a glimpse beyond this illusion

I was soaring ever higher

But I flew too high

Though my eyes could see, I still was a blind man

Though my mind could think, I still was a mad man

I hear the voices when I'm dreaming

I can hear them say

Carry on, my wayward son

There'll be peace when you are done

Lay your weary head to rest

Don't you cry no more

Masquerading as a man with a reason

My charade is the event of the season

And if I claim to be a wise man, well

It surely means that I don't know

On a stormy sea of moving emotion

Tossed about, I'm like a ship on the ocean

I set a course for winds of fortune

But I hear the voices say

Carry on, my wayward son

There'll be peace when you are done

Lay your weary head to rest

Don't you cry no more

No!

Carry on, you will always remember

Carry on, none can equal the splendor

Now your life's no longer empty

Surely heaven waits for you

Carry on, my wayward son

There'll be peace when you are done

Lay your weary head to rest

Don't you cry (Don't you cry no more)

No more

MESSAGE

So a man was driving through a neighborhood and decided to stop at a park to watch a Little League baseball game. He sat near the first base line and asked one of the kids what the score was. And he smiled and said, "It's 14 to nothing for them."

And the man said, "Well, I'm a little stunned that you are not discouraged because of the score."

He said, "Discouraged? Why should I be discouraged? We haven't been up to bat yet!" [Congregants laugh]

So, how many people have ever faced so much adversity that you got a bit discouraged? Anybody ever get discouraged? How many people have ever been so overwhelmed and hopeless by some situation that you actually contemplated just or you felt like giving up? Anybody?

How many people have ever made a lot of progress towards something, whether it was a diet or whether it was with exercise or improving your relationship, but then you slip right back into old patterns and you were right where you were before? Anybody ever have that?

And last one: how many people are good at motivating yourself, especially when things get tough? How many could use a little support in staying motivated when things get tough?

This morning, we are completing our seven-week "Songs of Life" series where I take a famous hit song and infuse a spiritual message through it -- using it as inspiration. In the last seven weeks, we looked at first, "Doctor My Eyes" by Jackson Brown; "Daydream" by The Lovin' Spoonful; "Home" by Michael Bubl ; "Anticipation" by Carly Simon; "Like a Rolling Stone" by Bob Dylan. Last week we looked at "The Living Years" by Mike and the Mechanics.

And today we'll wrap up with Kansas' 1976 hit, "Carry On Wayward Son." The song was written by the guitarist and keyboardist, Kerry Livgren. And they had been doing good as a band. They were a good album band, but they actually never had a hit. And, you know, their fourth album was kind of not as great as they had hoped. And so, they were really, really kind of kind of dying for a hit. And they were a bit frustrated.

And he usually wrote 70% of the songs, and their vocalist, Steve Walsh, would write 30%. And so, he brought his -- a couple of days before the recording -- expecting Steve to have some songs. And he had writer's block, so they were a couple of songs short. So Kerry had to write a last-minute song, just before the recording and came up with "Carry On Wayward Son."

And the message is really autobiographical: that it was about his spiritual path. This is the first "Songs of Life" song I remember using that actually was *intended* to be a spiritual song. And it's about him seeking higher levels of truth and the struggles as he moves through the struggles of life.

He said that the song was intended to be a song of self-encouragement to say, *"Carry on! Hang in there! Keep going; keep seeking! Stay positive through the highs and lows so you can rise above and lift yourself through those experiences."*

The song was really a breakthrough song. They went from just being a good album band to having an incredible hit, and they became very popular.

One of the things about the song is: in the original, the opening -- it's a cappella. And then they go into this long, colorful, beautiful, powerful guitar riff, which was something that hadn't been done before. So, they certainly had an imprint in adding creativity -- and it's a pretty long song too! -- and length to certain songs.

I love how it was like; it was *"Carry on, my wayward son."* It wasn't like, carry on, my really good son, my smart son, my successful son" It was a *wayward* son, which means my unruly, delinquent, making-bad-choices, never-listening-because-you're-too-hard-headed son, who doesn't get it all right and tends to make some poor choices. My son who has lost his way.

So, how many people have ever been wayward or know someone in your life that's a little unruly, delinquent, and doesn't like to listen or follow the rules? Anybody have that in your life?

And so, when I hear, *"Carry on, my wayward son,"* automatically I think of, *"Carry on my prodigal son"* -- Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son -- and it has certain connections, as well. It's about a man with two sons. And one of the sons says, *"Hey, I want my inheritance now, and I'd like to take off."*

Now, the only time back then you would get your inheritance is when your father died. So, when he says, *"I'd like my inheritance and to leave now,"* he's saying, *"I wish you were dead."* It is the highest level of disrespect you could give to your parents, because it's saying, *"Not only do I wish you're dead and I want my money, but I'm not taking care of you in the future,"* because that's how it was culturally back then. So, it was a pretty strong and emphatic level of disrespect and rudeness that the son put upon the father.

So, he takes his inheritance, and it says he goes to a far country, which really means that he disconnected from God; disconnected from his father; disconnected from the Source. So that was wayward bad choice number one.

And then the second one is that he squandered all of his money. He was careless; he was undisciplined; he was wasteful. And he lost all that he had.

And so, there was a famine. He lost all his money; he's broke; he's down. And he's eating with the pigs. And, at some level, feeling down; feeling broken and broke. Then he realizes it was his choices that got him right where he is. Kind of laying there with the pigs and realizing, *"It's my choices."*

And the fact is: for everyone, in our lives, where we are is an accumulation of the choices that we have made and that we do make. And the truth is: we're all on a journey. Every one of us is seeking. We're on a spiritual quest. And we are also a bit wayward at times. You know, sometimes we can be a little stubborn. Sometimes we could be a little delinquent and not want to follow the rules. And sometimes we can squander our talents. We can squander our power; squander our peace and happiness. And we can make mistakes and missteps.

But this song -- recognizing how tough life can be and how difficult the spiritual journey is -- is actually a song of reassurance. It is a song of comfort; a song of encouragement; a song of empowerment; and a song of hope.

***Carry on my wayward son
There'll be peace when you are done
Lay your weary head to rest
Don't you cry no more***

It is a powerful, powerful song, and I think a song of compassion, as well as encouragement. And those words -- those lyrics -- kind of reflect on Jesus' words when he said, *"In this life there will be trials and tribulations, but be of good cheer ..."* Be of good cheer! *"...for I have overcome the world."*

And so, we're going to look at three life lessons and a spiritual message that comes through this amazing and wonderful song, "Carry On Wayward Son."

And the first one is that in the importance of believing in ourselves; you have to **BELIEVE IN YOURSELF.**

So, in this store, this little girl is sitting on Santa's lap. And she looks at him and says, "*Do you believe in yourself?*" [Congregants laugh]

And it's a really important question for all of us. Do you believe in yourself? You know, I truly believe that believing in yourself is absolutely the first step needed to achieve anything in life. Because it is only when we believe in ourselves that we connect to the truth and the power of who we are. I mean, you show me someone successful, and I will show you someone who believes in their self. Steve Jobs, Martin Luther King, Michael Jordan, Caitlin Clark, Taylor Swift, Mark Cuban ... you name it. You know, Mr. Wonderful -- Kevin O'Leary, for those fans of *Shark Tank*. That all these individuals believed in themselves! And it is such an important thing.

I saw this framed quote and it said, "*She believed she could, so she did.*" I don't know who she was. I don't know what she did. But that quote and just reading it made me realize the importance in believing in oneself if we want to succeed; if we want to achieve.

You know, if we don't believe in ourselves, it's hard to be happy. If we don't believe in ourselves, it's hard for us to enjoy our career and to enjoy our relationships. To believe in ourselves is to believe in God. And to believe in God is to believe in ourselves, because we are created in the image and likeness of God. To believe in ourselves is to know that we are a child of God: that our nature is divine, and that we are an amazing spiritual being.

"I am a child of God."

Together: [with congregants] *"I am a child of God."*

"I believe in myself."

Together: [with congregants] *"I believe in myself."*

"I am an amazing spiritual being."

[Congregants:] *"I am an amazing spiritual being."*

"I believe in myself."

[Congregants:] *"I believe in myself."*

"The Spirit of God is in me."

[Congregants:] *"The Spirit of God is in me."*

"I believe in myself."

[Congregants:] *"I believe in myself."*

"I believe in myself."

[Congregants:] *"I believe in myself."*

Take a deep breath and turn the person you're left to right and say, "*Believe in yourself.*"

[Congregants to one another:] *"Believe in yourself."*

So, what I love about the story of the prodigal son -- my favorite part: so he squanders everything, squanders anything; he's with the pigs. And my favorite line says, "*And then he came to himself.*" And then suddenly, he believed in himself. Suddenly, he realized who he was as his father's son: rightfully entitled to the inheritance and all the goodness of his father.

It is when he began to realize who he was, and believe in himself, he was able to rise and go back to his father, where he repented; where he asked for forgiveness; where he learned from his mistakes; and where they celebrated and rejoiced together.

And that is a powerful thing. And it wouldn't have happened if he didn't come to himself to believe, *"This is who I am. This is who I am meant to be. That I am a child of God. I am an amazing spiritual being. The Spirit of God is in me. I believe in myself."*

You know, the Universe and God already support us and love us and believe in us. The question is: Do we love, support and believe in ourselves?

You know, another aspect of believing in ourselves -- I love the line:

There'll be peace when you are done

And we would think that means, well, when you're dead; when you're not living. No! There'll be peace when you are done resisting and fighting against life. There'll be peace when you are done pretending to be something that you're not. There'll be peace when you're done doubting your own worth, your own value; doubting your own spiritual path and the purpose for which you have come.

You know, peace isn't a future promise; it is a present practice. And if we want to step into a level and know our wholeness; know the truth of who we are; and to achieve great things, it starts with believing in yourself. Are you willing to believe in yourself?

"I believe in myself."

Half voice together: [with congregants] *"I believe in myself."* Take a deep breath.

Now, the second thing this song teaches is to **ENCOURAGE YOURSELF.** Believe in yourself, and then encourage yourself.

Savannah Gibson, in an article entitled "Why Encouragement Counts," says, *"If you are living and breathing, you need encouragement, because there is a lot of negativity in this world. You can get easily discouraged in this world, and we already have a negative bias built into us. Every one of us needs encouragement, regardless of our age or stage; regardless of our position or our stature. We are hardwired to desire and need encouragement."*

Sometimes all that's needed is just a little bit of encouragement to make the difference between something we'll do and not do; something we'll achieve and something we will not achieve. Sometimes just hearing the words, *"I know you can do it! You have got it in you. You're going to be so good at that; you're going to crush this thing. You are amazing!"* Just to hear a word of encouragement sometimes makes such a huge difference in giving us the boost that we need to succeed and to move forward.

How many people have ever had someone encourage you at a time where you were a little bit down? Anybody here? And I'll be every one of us has also encouraged someone else in a time of need to tell them, *"You can do it. You've got to keep going."*

The Book of Proverbs, Chapter 25, Verse 11 says, *"The right word spoken at the right time is like precious gold set in silver."*

Encouragement is always good. Encouragement is always helpful, especially when things are not going well for ourselves. You know, I love some of the lyrics in this song. Here are some:

***Masquerading as a man with a reason
My charade is the event of the season***

***And if I claim to be a wise man, well
It surely means that I don't know***

***On a stormy sea of moving emotion
Tossed about, I'm like a ship on the ocean ...***

***Though my eyes could see, I still was a blind man
Though my mind could think, I still was a mad man ...***

What I love about those lyrics: they show that the spiritual life and that the human experience is not easy. There are ups and downs. There are uncertainties. Sometimes we feel like we are tossed like a ship on the ocean. Sometimes there are storms in our lives and challenges in our lives. Sometimes we miss a mark and fail and fall. You know, there are times that we think we're making lots of progress to find out, *"I'm still blind. I'm still a little mad and not seeing things as clearly as I'd like."*

Anybody ever ... You know that expression, *"Sometimes it feels like it's three steps forward and two steps back"*? Anybody relate to that at all? Life is not an easy thing. And it can be very frustrating, and that's especially when we all need encouragement.

How many people have ever messed up, failed, or felt short of an expectation? And instead of encouraging yourself, you beat yourself up? You put yourself down; you're really harsh and judging yourself?

And so a good question for all of us is: So, how well do you encourage yourself on a scale of one to 10? How supportive are you of yourself? How well do you nurture yourself? How well do you affirm yourself? How well do you build yourself up? And in what ways could you get better at encouraging yourself?

You know, for most of my ministerial career, every Saturday night, I would phone my mom and say, *"Mom, tell me I'm going to do a really good job in my talk tomorrow."* [Congregants laugh] My mom was so cool! Every week when I called, she would do it like it was the first time. Never once did I hear her say, *"Come on; you ask me that every week!"* [Congregants laugh] And I really appreciated that encouragement; it made a huge difference!

Encouragement is powerful! And the thing is: there isn't always going to be someone there to encourage us when we need it. So we need to be our best supporter. We need to be our best coach; our best ally.

1 Thessalonians says, *"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up."* 1 Samuel says, *"David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."* Even David, the king ... Even David, the warrior ... Even David, the poet, regularly encouraged himself in his faith, in his belief, in his prayer life. Because it's easy to be discouraged in this world.

You know, Abe Lincoln -- president, brilliant, one of the greatest ever -- they said that he needed encouragement and always appreciated it through his tough times. You know, J.R. Tolkien was really good friends with C.S. Lewis, and it was C.S. Lewis' encouragement that got him to write *The Lord of the Rings*. Imagine that: that if he did not encourage him, that we would not have *The Lord of the Rings* and that trilogy. You know, encouragement is vital. It's powerful. And it's important ... especially from ourselves.

Someone said, *"Sometimes you've got to look at yourself and say, 'You got this, champ ... even though your socks don't match and you ate cereal for dinner.'"* [Congregants laugh] *"You've still got it; you can do it!"*

Sidney Madwed said, *"If everyone received the encouragement they needed to grow, the genius in everyone would absolutely blossom, and this world would be filled with abundance beyond our wildest imagination."*

Could you imagine your life if you had no encouragement? And could you imagine your life if you had all the encouragement you needed to grow, to blossom, and to evolve? We all need encouragement. Let's not tear ourselves down. Life's already hard! Life's already difficult! But let's build ourselves up and encourage ourselves to carry on.

And finally, the thing I think this teaches is the importance to carry on, **TO PERSEVERE**.

Here's what it says in the Book of James, Chapter 2, Verse 4: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you enter trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Allow perseverance to finish its work in you so that you may be whole, complete, and lacking in nothing."*

I love the lines:

***Carry on, you will always remember
Carry on, none can equal the splendor***

There is something about when you persevere: that you seem to break through some invisible barrier where you feel more confident. You feel more powerful; you feel more whole; and you feel more like who you came here to be. Carry on! Persevere! Don't give up! Keep trying! Rise above! Mistakes and failures are a part of life and the spiritual journey, but we've got to keep carrying on. We've got to keep keeping on.

Ervin Seale -- in his book, *Live and Learn* -- says, *"Suffering and misery have this virtue: that they have the tendency to open the mind to self-discovery and self-realization."*

You know, J.K. Rowling, who wrote the Harry Potter books, was broke, divorced and rejected by 12 publishers. She said this: *"Rock bottom became the solid foundation upon which I rebuilt my life."*

Rock bottom became the solid foundation upon which I built my life ... which means that it was perseverance. She didn't give up or feel discouraged. She persevered and let it be her foundation. You know, she encouraged herself when no one else would. She believed in herself when no one else would and she persevered. And that is why she rose to such greatness.

Anybody watching the NHL hockey playoffs? Edmonton Oilers. Wayne Gretzky said this. He said, *"A big shot is just a little shot who kept shooting!"* [Congregants laugh] Because one of the things that Gretzky absolutely believes is that greatness comes from perseverance. Greatness comes from the will to keep trying; the will to keep going.

Back to Ervin Seale. He said something really interesting about giving this symbolic metaphysical representation of the two sons. So, the one son went and squandered everything; came back; his dad celebrated him. The other son was always there. He was like, *"Hey, I've been here! No; no party for me; no party at all!"*

And so here's what Ervin Seale said. He said the older son -- the one that stayed home -- represents in us a conservative mindset that sometimes is too afraid to take risks and to strive, and to achieve for greater and reach beyond its grasp. It is that mindset that chooses to play it safe; that mindset that sometimes gets stuck in stagnant; that mindset that says we're alive but really not living. Not willing to expand; not willing to move out of our comfort zone.

And he said the wayward son -- or the prodigal son -- actually represents a risk taker. Someone who is willing to be daring and makes mistakes and fails and falls, and is still willing to learn; willing to repent; willing to ask for forgiveness; willing to expand; willing to return home; willing to reconnect and willing to rejoice. He represents the person who wants to be in the game; who wants to be in the arena.

So, my question for all of us is: Where in your life are you playing it too safe? Not trying; not expanding; and not reaching out? And where in your life are you being called to persevere? To press on? To step out and reach out and take a chance? And to hang in there and to keep on keeping on?

A priest was approached one night by Satan himself. "Do not be frightened," Satan said. "I have an offer to make. I will make you tremendously powerful, famous and rich. In return I want one small favor and that is half of your ability to hear."

The priest was stunned and said, "Let me think about it for a few days."

The next morning the priest requested to meet with the bishop. "Your Excellency, I need your advice for a temptation that I have been given." He shared the story with the bishop.

The bishop said, "A deal with Satan? No; no! That will destroy your soul!" But he could see that the priest was not moved at all. So, the bishop suggested a meeting with the archbishop, and went to him and said, "Your Excellency, this priest has an urgent matter that needs your help." And he told the story.

And the archbishop bowed his head and prayed. And then he said, "First, your hearing is a gift from God. And we don't mess with or give away that. We would never sacrifice that. And secondly, a deal with Satan? No! That is absolutely out of the question!"

But the priest against was not convinced. So, imagining all the wealth he had, he just could not be moved. So, the Archbishop requested an audience with the Pope. And all three of them sat in the papal office. And the Archbishop said, "Your Holiness, this priest has a terrible temptation and need your advice."

And the Pope said, "Huh? Could you speak a little louder?" [Congregants laugh]

Woo! That was a long way to go for barely a laugh at all. [Congregants laugh]

So, the fact is: every single one of us is in search of something. Every one of us is on a spiritual quest; a spiritual journey. And on that path, it is not easy. On that path, we can be wayward. We can make mistakes and missteps and lose our way.

But the way to find our way and find ourselves is to believe in ourselves; to encourage ourselves; and to persevere and keep on keeping on.

And those are the three life lessons in the spiritual message we get from the song, "Carry On Wayward Son."

God bless you.