

*A Friend in Time of Failure*

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace Church located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet was created from a message preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

*All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.*

GRACE PUBLICATIONS  
P.O. BOX 18715  
BALTIMORE, MD 21206

Printed in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A.

Copyright © 2000

Grace Publications is a ministry of  
Greater Grace World Outreach, Inc.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

*INTRODUCTION* ..... 5

*Chapter 1* ..... 7

*THE TRUEST FRIEND*

*Chapter 2* ..... 13

*BORN FOR ADVERSITY*

*Chapter 3* ..... 20

*THE FRIEND OF SINNERS*

*CONCLUSION* ..... 26



## INTRODUCTION

The most sacred relationships are friendships that have gone through the Cross. Many people do not have real friendships because they haven't allowed their relationships to go through the Cross.

Often, marriages lack the quality of friendship. For example, a wife who is very insecure because of wounds from her past may need lots of attention. Yet, if her husband has not established or maintained a godly friendship with her, he will react instead of understanding and covering her when her emotions flare up.

The Bible says in John 15:13 that the greatest friendship is manifested when someone lays down his life for a friend. Jesus said to His disciples, "You are my friends if you do what I tell you. I will no longer call you servants, for a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, because I have told you every single thing that My Father has told

Me" (see John 15:14-15).

Think of it! Jesus Christ knows everything about us. There is not one thing hidden from Him; yet, He desires to be our personal friend. This booklet reveals how secure that friendship is and how we can become true friends to others. Friendship reveals the Father's heart of love.

*Chapter One*  
THE TRUEST FRIEND

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

“For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!” (Luke 7:33-34).

Jesus said to His disciples, “You are my friends.” Though they were not trustworthy friends at that time, they were His friends, and He told them everything the Father told Him in His humanity. He didn’t hold anything back from them.

So the religious people, including the Pharisees and the scribes who interpreted the original texts of Scripture, had a tremendous problem. They couldn’t figure out the Messiah, because

He was always hanging around with sinners.

In Luke 15:1 and 2, the Word of God says that publicans and sinners drew near to Jesus so they could hear Him. “And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” Because they were self-righteous, the Pharisees thought it was wrong for Jesus to be around crooks and prostitutes. But the Word of God says in Hebrews 7:25 that “he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

Jesus’ heart was to reach out to sinners with His saving love.

### *Separate from Sinners, He Still Draws Us Near*

Hebrews 7:26 says we have a high priest “who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” Jesus has always been separate from what sinners do, yet He is with us to help us in our time of trouble. That is why we must understand this message.

First of all, every person needs to be loved in his failure. That is so vital to understand: *All* people need to be loved in their failure.

Secondly, Jesus loved each of us while we



were failing. This is how you can know whether or not somebody loves you with God's love, and whether you have God's love for others: God's love goes on in the midst of failure. That is why it is so much fun to go knocking on doors and to see souls get saved. We never know what people are going through. We simply care for their souls, and we want to love them in their failure.

Thirdly, God's love is consistent and will always love people out of their failure. Think of that: God's consistent love always loves us out of our failure. Consider what Paul went through. He did everything he should not have done, and he didn't do the things he should have done (Romans 7:15). Yet, the Holy Spirit loved him right out of his failure and brought him into Romans chapter eight, where he consistently referred to the work of the Holy Spirit (after primarily referring to himself and his failures in the seventh chapter).

Something changed for the apostle Paul. At the end of himself, he somehow grasped the truth about grace and the goodness of God (Romans 2:4). That is the purpose of the grace of God: to love people in their failure—just as they are—and then, to love them out of their failure by patient, consistent love.

After three years of walking with Christ and even vowing to die for Him, Peter failed and denied Christ three times. Because of his guilt, he didn't want to be near Christ, even after seeing Him twice in post-resurrection scenes. But on the shore of Galilee, in John 21:15-18, the Lord ministered very personally to Peter.

Jesus loved Peter in his failure. But most importantly, the Lord didn't point out his failure; He never mentioned Peter's failure. He just loved him. By the time of Acts chapter two, Peter had become the first preacher to the Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans.

God loved Peter out of his failure. Do you know how He accomplished that? Through friendship. The resurrected Jesus, who had been the friend of sinners while He lived on earth, was still a friend to Peter.

### *Love That Is Willing to Take a Risk*

The Bible says in Matthew 9:10 that when Jesus sat down to eat, the publicans and sinners (which included the disciples), sat down with Him.

Looking on, the scribes and the Pharisees said, "Why does He eat with publicans and sinners?" That really bothered them. Imagine what

you would think every time you saw Jesus with sinners. They didn't look good, and they weren't living right, and there was Jesus. Of course, they thought the worst; however, Jesus was separate from sinners, and He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). But His love was willing to take the risk to win them.

Jesus heard what the religious hypocrites were saying (Matthew 9:12), and this is what He said: "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

Then He said, "Go and learn what this means: 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice.' I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to change their minds" (see Matthew 9:13).

The Pharisees said in Luke 7:33 that John the Baptist *didn't* eat and *didn't* drink, and they accused him of having "a devil." But Jesus came eating and drinking, and they accused *Him* of being gluttonous, a winebibber, and a friend of publicans and prostitutes!

Jesus' reply? "Wisdom is justified of all her children" (Luke 7:35). This is what He was saying: "First, I'm going to meet them where they are. Second, I'm going to love them where they are. Third, I'm going to keep right on loving them where they are. Fourth, I'm going to love

them out of where they are. And fifth, I'm going to love them to keep them from going back in it."

What a Friend!

## Chapter Two

# BORN FOR ADVERSITY

“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).

It is a beautiful thing when we realize that from eternity past, everything Jesus did was for sinners. Everything.

He came to die for sinners (Romans 5:8). He ate with sinners. He never gave up on a sinner. He was numbered with the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12). He became sin, though He knew no sin, to make us the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). He ever lives to make intercession for us as sinners (Hebrews 7:25). That is what God calls being a friend.

You talk about having a friend? We have One! We have the dearest, truest, kindest friend in all the universe: Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Thank Him for that, and praise Him.

He is the friend of sinners. Yes, *sinners*. He wouldn't give up on Abraham, though for thir-

teen years, Abraham did not speak with God (Genesis 16:16 to 17:1). Anxious to see God's promise fulfilled, instead of waiting on God he went in with Hagar, the bondwoman, and produced Ishmael, "the wild man." Nevertheless, three times in the Bible (2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8, and James 2:23) Abraham was called a "friend of God."

The Lord would not give up on His friend, and this is why: Proverbs 17:17 says that a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. Jesus Christ is a friend that sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). It doesn't matter what the adversity is—whether it is caused by our own disobedience or by something outside of our control—a friend is born for adversity, and in the time of trouble, a brother never stops being a friend.

Can you see why married couples should develop this kind of friendship with each other in Christ through the Cross?

"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Isn't that wonderful news?

### *Nothing Can Separate Us from God's Love*

Peter, you can't get out of God's love. Stop trying. So, you don't want to see Him. You are

afraid. You are guilty. Still, you cannot get out of His friendship. He loves you at all times, and He was born for what you are going through right now, Peter.

David, you will never be able to get out of God's love. He is going to say that you fulfilled all the will of God as a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22).

Samson, you have really been a bad example, but you are going to end up being a hero of faith (Hebrews 11:32).

Proverbs 17:9 says, "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends." A friend is not somebody who goes around criticizing everything and everyone he sees. But he who covers transgressions seeks Calvary's love. And he that repeats the matter separates even friends, because he is of the devil.

### *Love Others As Yourself*

The Bible says that in order to have friends, you need to show yourself friendly (Proverbs 18:24a); and when you are in trouble, "there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24b). There are many great men in the Bible whose lives serve as examples to live

by. But regarding the subject of friendship, I have always been touched by the life of Jonathan.

In 1 Samuel 18:1-3, Jonathan's soul was knit with David's soul. Because he loved him as his own soul, Jonathan made a covenant with David.

In 1 Samuel 18:4, Jonathan gave David his robe, his garments, his sword, his bow, and his girdle. He was saying, "I'm supposed to be king, but David, you are the man. You are God's man to be king." So Jonathan gave up his right as an heir to the throne of his father, Saul.

In 1 Samuel 19:1-5, Jonathan heard his father's desire to kill David, so he warned David of Saul's plan. Then he pleaded with Saul not to kill David.

In 1 Samuel 20:4, Jonathan told David, "Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee."

In 1 Samuel 20:15-17, Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David that when he died, David would take care of his household with the same kindness he had shown Jonathan while he was alive.

And then the Word of God says, in 1 Samuel 20:34, that Jonathan would not eat at his father's



table because he knew Saul planned to kill David. Jonathan was not sentimental. He warned David and helped him plan an escape.

### *Empty Places*

“Then Jonathan said to David, To morrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty” (1 Samuel 20:18).

Later, in 1 Samuel 20:25, “The king [Saul] sat upon his seat, as at other times, even upon a seat by the wall: and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul’s side, and David’s place was empty.”

After my first wife died, I remember the empty seat. Even though I knew she was in heaven, completely free from the pain of her illness, her place was empty, and I missed her so much. I remember the empty place after a friend has died. When a member of our church goes home to be with God, if they usually sat in the same place, I will look to where they used to sit. It is as though they left an empty seat, and they are greatly missed.

A wife told me that her husband had left her for another woman after twenty-five years of marriage. She said, “Every time I eat, the place where he always sat is now empty.”

A mother told me that her son was shot in

cold blood. Now at the dinner table, his seat is empty.

A young girl wrote that her mother committed suicide. She didn't know why it happened, and she said that her mom was a wonderful mother. "No longer can I go sit with her in her room at night; and at the table, her place is empty." We were able to share the gospel with this girl and to tell her about the Savior, the Friend who will never leave her nor forsake her (Hebrews 13:5), and she got saved. Still, the mother's seat is empty, and her daughter misses her so much.

Jonathan said, "You will be missed, David, because your seat will be empty."

### *A Friend in Life and in Death*

In 2 Samuel 1:23, after Saul and Jonathan died in battle, David said, "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions."

Talk about friendship! Saul had tried to kill David, yet David was still his friend. As many times as Saul made attempts against his life, David refused to bring that up. He would only

bring up the good about him—that He was lovely and pleasant in his lifetime: “I don’t remember the bad he did; I only remember that he was once a good man.”

Lovely and pleasant in their lifetime, and in death, they were not separated. The Holy Spirit wrote these things through David’s heart. Then in verses 24 and 25, he said, “Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!...”

In other words, he was saying, “Weep over this wonderful and mighty man. Remember all that he did for you, Israel.”

This “wonderful” man? On more than one occasion, he tried to kill David. But that is not how David remembered him. How was that possible? This was David’s philosophy: “I will not seek for men to love me. I am just going to seek to love them. If they love me in return, that’s wonderful; but if they don’t, I will still love them.” When Saul was gone, David’s confession was filled with the mercy he received for the rest of his life: The *sure* mercies of David (2 Chronicles 6:42; Psalm 23:6; Acts 13:34).

### *Chapter Three*

## THE FRIEND OF SINNERS

“...But I have called you friends...” (John 15:15*b*).

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

The first and most important thing is to love God and to love men. The second most important thing is to be loved by God’s people. The love we experience as members in particular in the Body of Christ helps us to know we are loved by God. We need to know that because of the things that go on in this world we live in. David was able to be a friend to Saul because Jonathan taught him how to be a friend. Think of that!

Jonathan knew he was in line to be king. He was an excellent military man, with extraordinary diplomatic skills, while he also had integrity. But with all of his qualifications, Jonathan rec-

ognized God's anointing. Therefore he said, "I know that you are God's man, David. So I will give you five things that relate to battle: my robe, symbolizing my kingdom; my garment, to be worn with special ornaments; the sword, to fight with in battle; the bow; and then the girdle, which speaks of the strength of a king."

### *A Friend, through Thick and Thin*

A friend loves at all times. God loves us at all times; that is certain. Is there ever a time that you or I could have stopped God's love? No, because He loved us when we were yet sinners. He loved us when we didn't respond. He loved us when we failed, and loved us dearly and sweetly. And after all of that, He loved us out of our failure. But if we fail again, He will keep on loving us.

In the end, God's love keeps us from failing in the same way, over and over again. This is why: God is not a "fair-weather" friend. He never remembers one sin you or I have ever committed. In Jeremiah 50:20, people tried to search out the sins and iniquity of Israel and Judah. But He declares, "they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." In other words, neither Israel nor Judah have any sins ac-

according to God's record. Is that our attitude toward ourselves and each other? It is what God Almighty says. That is the Word of life. That is the Word of grace. That is the Word of God.

Oh, I thank God today that one of the dearest, most sacred things on earth is friendship—not conditional friendship but *true* friendship. I am so thankful for that.

That is why God said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will" (Acts 13:22) He said it because He knew that David would not touch Saul, even when he could have (1 Samuel 24:12 and 26:11). David would not touch God's man, though God's man was trying to kill him. Instead, he was Saul's friend. He chose to be a friend.

### *Let It Go through the Cross*

When a friendship goes through the Cross, self is crucified and buried, and Christ is risen within the spiritual souls of the individuals. A marriage based on such a friendship is the kind of marriage God intended. They live as people who have been raised from the dead (Romans 6:13).

The Bible says very clearly that no man has

ever known greater love than the love of one who is willing to lay down his life for a friend. But, how do you lay down your life? It is by going through the Cross.

I say this and mean it with everything that's in me: My wife is my friend! God bless her. And there are so many people who are treasured friends. I don't know anyone who has more pure friendships than we have in the Body of Christ. Of course, we all may need to use rebound on occasion, but love says, "Just rebound and come right back."

### *Seeking the Lost*

Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. He didn't come for the self-righteous murmurers, although He died for them. He came to seek us.

He found some of us living in adultery, others in barrooms, and others lying and cheating. He found others who were living in self-righteousness—good people but proud. But it didn't matter where or how He found us. He said, "I want you! I am going to die for you. I want to be your Friend."

When you say, "Shouldn't I clean up my life first?" He says, "No. I will come and eat with

you. Where are you eating today?"

"Well, I don't think You would want to go there."

"Yes, I would. You just tell Me where you're eating today. I'll go where you go. I will come and sit down at your table."

The scribes hated that. Oh, they hated that! In Luke 7:36-48, when the prostitute came into Simon the Pharisee's house, she began to cry. She took her long hair and began to wipe Jesus' feet, which she had shed tears upon. Then she anointed Him with oil and started kissing His feet.

Simon said to himself, "He's doing *that* with a prostitute?"

Then Jesus gave this illustration: "If somebody owed you fifty million dollars, and you forgave him, and somebody else owed you five, and you forgave him, what do you think, Simon? Who would be the most thankful?"

And Simon the Pharisee said, "The one whom I forgave fifty million."

Jesus said, "You have judged rightly."

Then He turned to the prostitute, and He said, "Though your sins be many, they are all forgiven." And she walked out of that Pharisee's house just as white as snow.

He also went to the woman at the well. She



was living with a man who wasn't her husband, though she had been married—five times. When Jesus saw her, He said, "If you drink the water that I give you, you will never thirst again" (see John 4:10-14).

Do you know what she said? "Give me a drink of that water right now!" She got saved at that moment, in verse 15, and she went up to town to tell everyone about what had happened.

What we need is to know that Jesus is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. He is a friend who has loved you in your failure. Then, He loved you as you continued to fail. Then, He loved you out of your failure. Finally, His love kept you from doing the same old things over again.

If God gave His own Son for you, and if you will believe that God can heal you, then just as you exercised personal faith in Christ for salvation, exercise personal faith in Christ for a promise for healing. Just believe God to heal you of the moods, bad memories, and mental blocks that have kept you from being the kind of friend you desire to be. Let Christ be your friend. Receive resurrection power for the present and hope for the future because you can't remember the past.

## CONCLUSION

A friend loveth at *all* times, not just when we are living right. Our hope for the future is not based upon our past. It is based upon the true friend, Jesus Christ, and His promises. He laid down His life and calls us friends. Our future is as good as the promises of God. Our past, on the other hand, is as bad as we remember it. And there is not one verse in the Bible where God can remember a bad thing about any one of us (Psalm 103:10; Hebrews 8:12). That is true, even after we go home to be with Him.

Imagine Saul looking down through the crystal sea in heaven and saying, "Why is David saying that about *me*? I was a wicked man, and he is calling me 'lovely and pleasant.' Wow! I can see that even in death, grace really works for me. Thank You, Lord."

*Dear Father, we thank You for all the precious friends You have given us. Most of all, we are thankful that You are our friend and that we can be Your*

*friends. Because of that, we can be friends to each other. Help us to let our friendships go through the Cross, Father, so we can experience the fullness of Your provision in every relationship. In Jesus' precious name, Amen.*