

*How God Measures
Greatness*

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 © 1999

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 5

Chapter 1 6

GREATNESS DEMONSTRATED IN GRACE

Chapter 2 9

GREAT MEN AFTER GOD'S HEART

Chapter 3 15

THE GREAT GOD WHO KNOWS US

CONCLUSION 19

INTRODUCTION

“...Thy gentleness hath made me great”
(Psalm 18:35*b*).

Every Christian filled with the Spirit should want to be considered great in the eyes of God. Heaven’s standard for greatness, however, is something far different from the world’s standard. Being a good leader doesn’t make one great. Building a large, well-known church isn’t a measure of greatness.

Greatness is brought to our lives by God’s gentleness. It isn’t developed by things we do or say. It isn’t reflected in where we have been. Grace worked into our lives by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit reveals greatness. Great people are “grace” people. They give what they have received and never demand repayment.

In this booklet, we will consider some of the things that characterize greatness and what such greatness produces.

Chapter One

GREATNESS DEMONSTRATED
IN GRACE

“Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you” (2 Corinthians 10:1).

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17).

It is so easy to exercise a gift. I have seen many people work very hard in their local assemblies, but who then speak unkindly about others behind their backs. No matter how hard they have worked, no matter how gifted they are, these people are not great. Proverbs 16:32 tells us that it is greater to be able to rule your own spirit than it is to take a city.

There is no victory so empty as revenge, no conversation as deplorable as negativity. Great

courage is in turning the other cheek. A meal is greatest when it is served to an enemy. No power is greater than the power of restraining love. These truths are easy to discuss; however, it takes God to produce their application.

Characteristics of Greatness

The greatness of Jesus Christ was that He considered Himself least among His disciples and became a servant. He said, "The greatest among you shall be the servant of all" (see Luke 22:26-27). Christ did not come to be ministered to, He came to minister (Matthew 20:28). That is greatness in God's eyes.

It is so much better for a Christian to love than to be loved. It is greater to forgive than to be forgiven. It is greater for a Christian to be kind than to have someone be kind to him. A great Christian excels at patience and doesn't expect people to be patient toward him. He lives on the grace side of life.

It is greater for a husband to lay down his life for his wife than to expect her to lay down her life. It is so much better to obey than it is to give a command. It is so much wiser to have compassion than it is to expect compassion. These are the characteristics of God's greatness.

Put on His Greatness

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness” (Colossians 3:12-14).

Why are these verses so critical? Because they make a mother and father great. They make children and teenagers great. They make a friend great. God is trying to teach us how to enter into His greatness.

When the woman caught in an act of adultery was brought before Jesus, He did not rebuke her. He forgave her and told her to go and sin no more (John 8:11). When He did this, it revealed His greatness. Forgiveness always demonstrates the grace of greatness. Forgetting the sin illustrates the greatness of God’s omniscience (Hebrews 8:12) working in the memory center of a man (Isaiah 55:7-9). And this is how men of God, like David, can know by the Holy Spirit that they are great without being proud.

Chapter Two
GREAT MEN
AFTER GOD'S HEART

The Lord Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion. Here is the Creator of the universe in greatness subjecting Himself to His creation: The guilty ones sentenced the only innocent One to death. The Lord Jesus Christ, in the beauty of His holiness, became the greatest sinner by allowing all of the sins of the world to be transferred to Him. That truly was an act of greatness.

When He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34), while enduring the pain and shame of their unholy gaze—that was greatness. His compassion still goes out to individuals without imputing sins to them—that is greatness that goes beyond understanding. That is love that goes beyond knowledge. It is mercy that rejoices against judgment, grace that is greater than all our sin (Romans 5:20).

Jesus Christ did not give an answer to the temple rulers, the Roman government, or the religious crowd as they harassed Him after His arrest. In greatness, He opened not His mouth. He could offer no defense because He was going to represent every sinner by paying for the sins of the world. This reveals why Jesus said, "I am meek and lowly in heart." He really was and surely is. This shows why He said, "Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." He surely does. His yoke is easy and His burden is light because of His greatness.

God's greatness remembers our sins no more. Jesus is called "gentle" in Isaiah 40:11. *Epious* is a Greek word Paul used for "gentle" in 1 Thessalonians 2:7: "But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children." *Epious* means "tenderhearted." A tender heart prompted Paul to write Romans 9:3: "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen [Israelites] according to the flesh." That is greatness. As he lay dying from the stones cast at him, Stephen prayed for those who attacked him: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (see Acts 7:59-60).

We need to be stirred up about what great-

ness really is. It is *not* having a strong physical body. Greatness is an attitude of God's grace and love coming through a person. And when that becomes the means of manifesting Jesus Christ's character, then greatness is truly great.

The Power of His Gentleness

David was an inspired poet, but that did not make him great. In 1 Samuel 17, he took a sling-shot and killed Goliath, but that did not make David great. He killed a lion and a bear with his hands in the wilderness—that didn't make him great. He surely ranks among the top military commanders in the history of the world, but even that did not make him great.

David's true greatness was revealed in other ways. In 1 Samuel 24:12, though King Saul was viciously pursuing him, David refused to touch God's anointed. David would not say a negative word about Saul. That was greatness. After cutting just a small piece of Saul's garment while hiding in a cave, David was convicted and repented for the act (1 Samuel 24:5-6). That is greatness.

Shimei threw stones and dirt at David, who was fleeing from Jerusalem (2 Samuel 16:5). To avenge David's honor, his general wanted to cut

off the man's head, but David stopped him, saying, "Who knows? perhaps God has sent him" (2 Samuel 16:10). That is greatness.

When his son Absalom went against him, David stood at the gate and told his army to be "gentle with Absalom for my sake. Be very gentle with Absalom. Yes, he has rebelled against me. And, yes, he wants the kingdom, but please be tenderhearted toward Absalom" (see 2 Samuel 18:5). Oh, it is much better to be tenderhearted toward the guilty than with revenge to pay them back for what they have done. When David learned that Absalom had died, he went to his loft and cried, "O Absalom! Absalom! I would have died for thee."

The secret of David's life is found in how he treated his enemies. The key to David's success was in refusing to act in revenge. David always acted in forgiveness and let God handle every matter.

This is why David was considered a great king. Did he sin? Oh, yes. Did he fail? Miserably at times. Did he have weaknesses? Yes, probably more than we know. But along with his weaknesses, David also possessed great strength from internalizing the character of God.

Greatness condescends to men of low estate.

“Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits” (Romans 12:16). If we really understand greatness and desire the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we will express love, joy, peace, *and* longsuffering. Then will come gentleness, divine goodness, faithfulness, meekness and temperance: “against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (see Galatians 5:22-24).

Living in Divine Inspiration

“Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side” Psalm (71:21).

“Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great. Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip” (Psalm 18:35-36).

Imagine having a chance to interview King David:

“Sir, you were a great king. Did your spears make you great?”

“No, they did not.”

“Was it your sword that made you great?”

“No, not at all.”

“You killed a bear and a lion with your hands. You slew Goliath with a sling. Again and again, you were successful in battle. You were wealthy, successful, brilliant in administration—just how did you do it?”

“None of those things made me great. It was the Lord and His gentleness that kept my steps and lifted me up continually. His gentleness made me great.”

David wrote the divine Word of God in psalm after psalm. But beyond that, he *lived* in the poetry of divine inspiration rather than just speaking or writing it. He lived in the nature of God instead of just talking about it. God’s gentleness made David a man after His own heart. That is real greatness.

Chapter Three

THE GREAT GOD WHO KNOWS US

Thank God for each individual in a church body who reaches out to others. It's the people that make a church great—those who love people with God's love and share the Gospel wherever they go, leading lost men and women to Christ. The ushers, the deacons, the elders—every portion is key. All those who pray, all those who are faithful to the assembly—these people bring greatness to a church body.

Do you want to see greatness? Watch the workers in the cafeteria, the folks sweeping the floors, those who care for the grounds, the singers in the choir—in them is where you will find true greatness.

Greatness is revealing humility toward men and meekness toward God. Greatness is showing patience toward those who hurt us while we remain secure in who we are in Christ and in

what He has done on our behalf.

Greatness is receiving grace and mercy from God, giving it to others, and not looking for something in return. Greatness is a husband using restraint and love rather than reaction toward his wife. It is a wife being meek in God even when her husband doesn't minister to her as he should.

The greatness of mercy is explained in the Greek word *epieikes*. This word speaks of mercy that supersedes legal justice. In dealing with us, God considers everything—our genetic code, our circumstances, our upbringing, our pain. He understands us better than we understand ourselves. This mercy opens the way to give us His great grace.

He Knows Our Frame

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psalm 103:10-14).

Every time we fail, God remembers our frame. That is the greatness of God. He considers our exposure to the world system, the mystery of iniquity, the process of our goings and comings, and the process of our transformation. God does not deal with us after the letter of the law. Instead, He does everything in His progressive grace and mercy.

If we understood greatness, we would see that it is not what is in a man's actions that pleases God, but what is in his desire toward God. It isn't what a man has done; it is what he desires to do that matters. It isn't what a man reveals; it is what he cries out to God to reveal. God sees these things and remembers that we are but dust.

A trailer truck can only carry so much weight because of its design, and God knows that His people can only carry so much because of our frames of dust. He is above, we are below. Our great God understands this. He always considers these things in His plan.

When we fail and get back up, it is because of grace that we get up (Proverbs 24:16). Even if we haven't conquered certain areas, when we cry out in sorrow, revenging our sin, that shows God our greatness in humility.

When church members are faithful and come to church, drawing near to God, doing all that they can, they express divine strength in obedience. They are the greatness of a congregation's life. They may struggle in some ways, but that is when God's greatness takes over. He recognizes strengths, He sees weaknesses. Victories may not come right away. There may be some going back and forth. But God still looks at earnest, fervent rebound in a man, and He calls it greatness.

CONCLUSION

To reveal greatness, we have to look at ourselves in Christ. Let us be occupied with Him and what He has done, and not with where we have been and what we can do. Be occupied with all of His promises, with all He is doing and all that He will do. Become occupied with what He is doing in us right now in grace.

Where sin abounds, God's great grace superabounds. Sin reigns only unto death, but God's grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by One, Jesus Christ (Romans 5:20-21).

Let us see greatness in others, and help them to develop their true greatness. What we share will build people up and keep them from falling back, below their potential. God's gentleness will make us great. He doesn't see any of us "in Adam," which speaks of the nature of the Fall. God's goal is always to get us to live in Christ because He sees us in Him.

It isn't what we have done or what we do.

Our gifts and our successes may matter in the world's eyes, but they do not make us great. It is our character in Jesus Christ that makes us great.