

Make a Stand for the Gospel

Pastor Steven Scibelli is a graduate of Stevens School of the Bible. In 1988 he led a team that included his wife, Linda; their two children, Lysa and Peter; and twelve others to Ghana, West Africa. Today, Greater Grace World Outreach in Ghana has expanded to 18 churches that have sent missionaries to Nigeria, Togo, and Liberia.

Staying true to the vision to spread the Gospel and to make disciples of men in the uttermost parts of the world, Pastor Scibelli has ministered in more than 20 African countries and 50 other countries over the last 20 years.

In between church planting and his bimonthly trips to Africa, the Scibellis live in Baltimore where he teaches at Maryland Bible College and Seminary and serves in the Missions and Outreach departments at GGWO.

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 © 2003

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 5

Chapter 1 7

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Chapter 2 15

MAKE IT ESSENTIAL

Chapter 3 20

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE

CONCLUSION 27

INTRODUCTION

There are choices, and then there are decisions. I can choose to do this or that, and the results of either could be equally good. But as a believer, I make decisions that leave me no options. Many of us know the song that goes, “I have decided to follow Jesus.... No turning back, no turning back.” That’s what I’m talking about.

This booklet came from a message I preached after returning from a Bible conference on a luxury cruise ship. Naturally speaking, I would have thought that to be rather ironic—definitely not my choice. But I made a decision to follow Jesus, and He is apt to take us where we would not go on our own. It proved to be a very fruitful time.

We are not just “in” Christ to go through life doing whatever. We are in Him so that whatever we do and wherever we do it, we can know that He has positioned us providentially to defend

the Gospel—to proclaim the truth about heaven and hell and about what Christ has done to put the devil on the run!

This booklet is dedicated to Jesus Christ and Pastor Carl H. Stevens, the examples of being set for the defense of the Gospel.

Chapter One

MAKE IT PERSONAL

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

“Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,

“For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace (Philippians 1:3-7).

Paul was writing the epistle to the Philippians from a Roman prison. As a partaker of grace, he said many things about joy, and peace, and thanksgiving, and contentment, and assurance, and strength—things that would never cause us

to imagine that he was in prison. But he was.

His words in this letter were conversational—as though he were talking face to face with the people in Philippi and trying to describe what God was doing in the situation. Twenty-one times he used the word “joy.” Yet the fact of the matter is that he was locked up—aware of his situation but more aware of God than the situation.

I like that! I want to be more aware of God than I am of what is going on around me, even though it is actually happening and I am in the middle. Recently I was a guest on a cruise ship for a Bible conference, and many times on that trip, I was aware of situations, but I was more aware of God. I was aware that the ship was moving and that my legs were not so steady—fading to the left, then fading to the right—but I was more aware of God than of the motion.

I like to run sprints a few times a week, and this boat had a big running deck up on top. This particular day there was quite a crowd on the track, and most of the people were walking or jogging. Since my stroke, I can't see out of my left eye and I was afraid I would knock some people over if I didn't run them over, so, I prayed that God would clear a path. Within a

few minutes, an unbelievable storm came up. The rain poured down, and everybody left, and I said, "Thank You, God." I had the deck all to myself.

Partaking of Grace

"...Knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17b).

"...In the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you are all partakers of my grace" (Philippians 1:7b).

Paul said that in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel, because he is a partaker of grace, we too can partake of his grace. I love how he made it personal. He said, "...*my* grace."

When he asked God three times to deliver him from his thorn in the flesh, Jesus said to the apostle Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9). And later Paul said, "It is *my* grace." I am going to personally appropriate the grace of God for my life. Grace is not some abstract phenomenon that I know about, and it is not just a concept I heard preached about—although that is where it begins, with the preaching of the Word. But I can personally apply the nature of God in every circumstance in my life.

Charles Spurgeon, “the prince of preachers,” once said, “The longest distance on the face of the earth is between the pulpit and the pew.” The longest distance on the face of the earth is between the speaker and the receivers, and it is because of the lack of the application of the Holy Spirit. Many people are not available to the Holy Spirit to apply to what is preached.

But the apostle Paul said, “It is my grace; and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, you are partakers of my grace.” Grace is a vital factor in the life of every believer.

And then, in verse 17 he says, “I am set for the defense of the gospel.” “Set”—what an awesome word that is. In the Greek language the word for “set,” *keimai*, means I am providentially positioned, placed, established, grounded, and settled. I am *set*. And it is for the defense of the Gospel.

I Am Not Where You Think I Am

Paul was saying, “I am set in a place providentially by God.” I am not just “in” Christ. I am not just in the Father’s plan, but I am in the Body of Christ, and I have been established and placed here strategically, for the defense of the Gospel.

“You think I am in prison. You think I am in the middle of the Philippian trial, among believers who lack humility, and having problems with people contending with one another. You think I am in the middle of the Gospel task, which I am. You think I am in the middle of what seems to be an unbearable trial for my life. You think I am in prison. And maybe as you look at it, by sight these things are true. But,” Paul said, “I would like you to know one thing: *I am set*. I am positioned by God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit—set—for the defense of the Gospel.”

For me, that means I am in a place where I am number one in receiving grace. I am in the place where I will be a receiver of grace. You can look at where I am by sight; you can look at problems, or difficulties, or say, “I’m a new student here, and I don’t even know where I live.” But listen: I am set for the defense of the Gospel. I said that to my wife one time. We had just moved to Africa.

We had been living six weeks in a hotel, and we had a second room with eight hockey bags with all of our belongings. And I said, “This room is eight by ten, and we are here, and we are in a small little room in Ghana, and we’ve

got two kids, and I don't even know what is happening here." She was cooking rice in a pan over charcoal in a coal pot, lighting the fire and cooking in the hallway because there was no place in the room to cook. One room had eight hockey bags, and the other room had us. It was a little bit difficult.

The way things looked by sight was strange. But you know something? We were set, placed there positionally and providentially by God for the defense of the Gospel. The Greek word for "defense" is *apologia*, which means "to give an answer." Our family was in a place where we were going to reveal not just the words of God, but the life of Christ.

Do You Know Where You Are?

So you may complain, "This hasn't happened," or "this is going on," or "I have this situation in the marriage," or "I have this problem with my health," or "I'm not so sure as a new student where I'm going to get the finances." Then there is this, then there is that—always something going on.

No. That is not what it's all about. I am providentially placed in a situation or a position where I am to receive grace. The place where I

am receiving grace also becomes the place where people are becoming disciples. That is the place where I am going to grow. That is the place where I'm going to be ready to proceed and to advance for the furtherance of the Gospel.

I am set. This fact comes with tremendous conviction. So, when the enemy comes in like a flood to lay accusation against the mind about what we think is going on, I just say, "Hello. I am set for the defense of the Gospel. I have been providentially positioned here by God."

And guess what! That might mean you won't like it. You might not like the fact that I've been placed here in this room next to you. "Why is it that way? I really wish for a better situation."

No. I am set. I am providentially positioned and placed in the eternal purpose of God for the defense of the Gospel. Therefore, I will bring forth a word of grace to people in the place where I am.

So rather than "I hope this situation changes," I know one thing that will never change. I have been set. I have been providentially placed by God.

I have been in fifteen cities in six countries in twenty-seven days. I am not set in those places. I

am set providentially and positionally placed where I am going to receive grace; furthermore, it is for the defense of the Gospel. It is to preach, and it is to teach, and it is to reveal, and it is to win the lost.

Chapter Two

MAKE IT ESSENTIAL

“But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Philippians 1:12).

Since getting saved in 1977, I have been providentially placed in the plan, by God the Father, to be a receiver of grace and to be involved with the bringing forth of the Gospel. Isn't that what Bible school is all about? How many of you are students in Bible school? I am. I want to be a student this year. We all ought to be students of the Word of God.

I have been set in Baltimore for the defense of the Gospel. I have been placed here providentially, to be a receiver of grace for the sake of the Gospel. Yes, I'm aware of all these situations that are going on all around me. But guess what? Concerning the details of life, I can see more with my eyes of faith toward God than I can see

with my natural senses.

When Adoniram Judson was in Burma, he buried wife number one, wife number two, wife number three, and three children. Even when he came to the place where he was just about ready to have a nervous breakdown because of depression, after pacing on his wife's grave for almost thirty days straight, he suddenly received an illumination of God's eternal providence, placing his life in Burma. Today, the Bible they use in Burma is still the one that he translated back in the 1800s. The Judson Bible is the only one in the whole country. He was set for what? He was set for the defense of the Gospel.

Study the Heart of God

Whatever it is that you do, it is so important to know that God has placed you there. It is vital to be set in Bible college—because as I am set in Bible college, I am providentially placed there to learn the heart of God. It is not just to learn black letters printed on white pages and have notebooks full of information that I try to use until I find out that it doesn't work, apart from God.

I have seen people graduate from Bible school, and they can't even tie their shoes, spiritually speaking. They have a lot of head infor-

mation but they have no life information.

I said to a student, "How come I never see you on evangelism?"

He said, "I didn't come here to evangelize."

I said, "You should get on the plane and go home then."

"But I came here to study!"

"Study?" I said. "You know what you should study? The heart of God."

If you study the heart of God, you will want to reach the lost. If you study a book with black letters on it, and it's not life to you, then it is not the heart of God. "You seek the Scriptures, and in them you think you have eternal life, but you won't come to Me" (see John 5:39-40). No. You see, Jesus Christ said, "I come: in the volume of the Book that is written of me" (Psalm 40:7 and Hebrews 10:7). If I do not meet Jesus Christ, then what have I met? I end up with a piece of paper that says, *You have graduated*. Wonderful. That's just wonderful.

Life. Isn't that what it's all about? Isn't that what Bible school is all about? Life! And the apostle Paul says, "You know something? I am set." I've been placed here to receive life, and to receive the Word, and to go to Bible school, and to be trained. I am positioned here because I've

got to be positioned here before I'm positioned there. Do you understand what this means?

Be Set Where You Are

You say, "I want to go to Africa."

I was just talking with someone the other day. He said, "I think God's calling me overseas to work in the African ministry. What do you think?"

I looked him squarely in the eye and whispered very slowly but with great clarity and firmness, "I m p a c t B a l t i m o r e!"

He said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Why don't you pick an area of Baltimore? Look at Pastor Brian Lange, one of the greatest examples of a missionary I have ever seen." He comes right out of France and Budapest, Hungary, seventeen years on the field, and he's got this big thing going on down in Patterson Park. He's got a storefront. He's got an English school there. He's got counseling going on there. But when he got here with his family, he didn't go on leave. He positioned himself in the ministry and went in to a local outreach area to do a work."

So I said, "Impact Baltimore. Be set here and someday you will be set there. Amen?"

I come here, to these meetings, to be a receiver of grace. And as I am set to receive the grace of God on a daily basis, then I am set, positioned providentially for the defense of the Gospel, the *apologia*, to speak the Gospel, to learn the Gospel, to be discipled, to disciple others to preach the Gospel, and this is what it's all about. I am set!

The Measure of a Man

What would it take to move you? An earthquake? Even that won't do it, because the earth will shake, but we will stay. It didn't move Paul, did it?

Richard Wurmbrand, a survivor of communist prisons, once said, "The measure of a man is what it takes to move him." Find out what a person is like when he loses his health, his money, his position, and everything else that is valuable to him. Find out what a person is really like when he has lost everything.

I don't wish that on anybody, especially myself. I don't. But you know what? I am set. My life, our lives. This is the place where I am growing in understanding that I have been set, providentially positioned for the defense of the Gospel. That is what my life is.

Chapter Three

MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE

I was traveling with my good friend Ivar in a certain country, and a guy was there ridiculing us because we were evangelizing. "So," Ivar said to him, "what do you do with your boring life?"

I thought, "That's a good comeback, Ivar. I like that."

The man said, "I'm just here to see how much money I can make."

He was after wealth. But, you know, God can do that with anybody's business. I preached to some businessmen in Ghana. I said, "I have a message for you. Put your money where God's heart is and watch God do something." I am set for the defense of the Gospel. This is the key.

When I was on that cruise ship, the first day on the upper deck this group from the Bahamas began to sing a little bit of soft music. I thought, "I wonder what this is all about." All the pas-

sengers were enjoying the day on the top deck—and few minutes later, a man got up and started to preach:

“You think you’re just here,” he said, “and you think you are just on a little trip. I’m telling you, you can go to heaven by receiving Christ as Savior.”

Needless to say, some people were not happy with that. People had come all that way, from all over the country, to go on the cruise and not be bothered by anything and just gorge themselves to death with food. They were not happy at all.

The preacher continued, “I want you to know that if this ship goes down, you will hear me say you should have listened to me. That was the scene in Acts 27. The apostle Paul said, ‘Don’t worry, we’re going to lose the ship, but every life will be saved, and not one hair of your head will be harmed.’ He was preaching the Gospel, and he was saying, as I am today, ‘You need to be born again.’”

I stood there listening next to some New Yorker who turned to me and said, “Hey, what is this guy doing in the middle of the boat? Isn’t this ridiculous?”

I said, “It is not ridiculous. It’s the truth.”

He goes, "You too?" He said, "You too? *You too??*"

Yeah, me three.

He said, "Oh my God! I came here to get away. I just want to get away and have some pleasure, and this? Born again? Eternal life? A purpose? What's your problem? I don't want to hear this!"

Later I found out that the preacher and the men singing with him were all policemen from the Bahamas who were born-again. I realized something about them, because I saw that they also preached in Belize, our port-of-call, in the middle of the city. They were on a cruise, but they were set for the defense of the Gospel. Isn't that awesome?

Get This Straight

In the final analysis, is my work what matters most?

"Hey, I got a job with the New York Stock Exchange."

No. That's not it. It is that I am set for the defense of the Gospel.

"I worked eight years in a prison."

No, no. Nope. Wrong again. I am what? Set for the defense of the Gospel.

“I sell pools for a living.”

No, no, no, no, no. I am set in any way I can do it, in any manner, through life, through the ministry, out of the ministry, whatever, this is all that matters: that I am set for the defense of the Gospel.

“Well, I don’t know. What would it be like if I married that person?”

No, no, no. The marriage has to be set—providentially positioned—for the defense of the Gospel. That is what matters. It is not where I live. Is it Africa? Is it Baltimore? Is it Uganda? Is it Pretoria? Is it Ghana? Is it Morocco?

No. I want my marriage and my family to be positioned providentially for the defense of the Gospel, because that is all that matters. I’m not saying that other things don’t matter. I know you’ve got to eat.

“Well, how’s that going to happen?”

How about faith? If my life is set for the defense of the Gospel, I believe that God will take care of all the trivialities like money. Money? What’s the big deal to God? Money?

What’s the Big Deal?

C.T. Studd was called by God. He saw a sign that read, “Cannibals Need Christ.” It was an-

nouncing a meeting where Carl Coomb would be preaching. So he said, "What the heck is that?" C.T. Studd had already done twenty years on the mission field between China and India.

Intrigued, he went in and heard Carl Coomb saying, "Liquor traders, Muslims, and Colonialists have been in the interior of Africa but no Christian has gone."

When this man of God with a missionary's heart heard that, he was angry at the state of Christianity. He walked out of the meeting and said, "This is ridiculous." He was fifty-five years old and ready to die. The doctor said he had a terminal illness. But he walked out of that meeting, and he was angry. "Why don't Christians go?!"

And the Holy Spirit said, "Why don't you?"

He went to the Mission Board, and they said, "Absolutely no." He went to the church, and they said, "No." He went to his wife, and she said, "Not only do I say no to you but I'm not following you." And he had no money. Four no's, and God said "go"—and he was fifty-five years old.

The doctors said that the trip from the coast to Khartoum would be enough to kill him alone. But thirty years later, at eighty-five years old, he

was still bicycling to tribes that would eat people. You know why? He was set for the defense of the Gospel.

His wife followed later. And yes, I know, we've read some stories about him. He was a little bit hard. God will use some of the strangest people. You know why? Because they are simply available.

There might be a lot more gifted people than some of us are, whether in this ministry or around the world. But do you know what? Availability is the key, not how gifted you are. God will gift the faithful person with exactly what they need.

Do you know what C.T. Studd was saying? "I am set for the defense of the Gospel," and he spent thirty years in Africa.

I am set in Baltimore for the defense of the Gospel. I am not set to do what everybody thinks I am doing. Now you are aware of my place. I am set.

"But I think I'm going to lose something else."

Well, what's going on, honey? I am set for the defense of the Gospel. I am set for the defense of the Gospel. None of these things move me, and neither do I count my life dear unto my-

self, that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry I have received with the Lord Jesus, to testify of the Gospel of grace.

CONCLUSION

In Acts 20:23, the Holy Spirit told Paul, "Everywhere you go, bonds and afflictions will go with you."

Do you know what Paul said about that, in verse 24? "None of these things move me. Even what the Holy Spirit tells me doesn't move me. He told me there are going to be trials everywhere. I'm not moved, because the Father has providentially positioned me. And even with what the Holy Spirit illuminates to me, that there will be trouble everywhere I go, I am set for the defense of the Gospel."

At home as a mother, you are set for the defense of the Gospel. In business, I am set for the defense of the Gospel. If I'm a pastor, I am set for the defense of the Gospel. I am set in the church as a member in particular, I am set in Bible school, I am set in outreach. I am set for the defense of the Gospel.

Father, thank You today for a people, and a min -

*istry, and a pastor. No matter what happens, as Jud -
son said before,*

*“In joy or sorrow, health or pain, my course is
onward still.*

*We sow on Burma’s barren plain, we reap on
Zion’s hill.”*

*We are set for the defense of the Gospel. So bless
each one. Bless in Jesus’ name, and we will all say, “I
am set for the Gospel.” Amen.*