

Purpose to Be a Friend

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

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INTRODUCTION

This is a message for today. It is really a very, very important theme for us as believers. Over the years, we have heard thoughts such as these, and they have gone into our hearts. These premises are really rooted in our spirituality.

True friendship is something that is very hard to find, even among believers. Sadly, personality rapport and a human frame of reference control so many of our exchanges, and very minor things can shake these kinds of relationships.

True friendship, however, stands because it is rooted in the things of God, the things that are eternal.

This booklet is a compilation of three messages preached during a Sunday morning service. Those who were there that morning marveled at the way the Holy Spirit orchestrated what was spoken by three speakers: Pastor Carl H. Stevens, Pastor Steven Scibelli, and

Pastor Thomas Schaller. The harmony and unity of these thoughts reflect just what God can do in the midst of true friends.

Chapter One
BORN FOR ADVERSITY

Pastor Carl H. Stevens

“Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have” (Luke 8:18).

“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:12).

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:1-2).

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (John 13:1).

In times of difficulty, I have realized the value and depth of real true friendship. If I were to ask you, “What is a friend?”, most of the time the description would not be something divinely understood.

At times you may think that someone is your friend, and then—bang!—he’s gone. The least little thing disturbed the friendship, which really wasn’t a friendship at all. There was a relationship, but that relationship was conditional.

What is a friend? In Luke’s gospel, we find these words: “Jesus Christ, a friend of sinners.” That means He is friend to the adulterer, even though He hates adultery. The liar, the thief—these people are indeed sinners. Yet, His blood covered their sins. Jesus Christ is their friend.

The Best Friend of the Worst Sinners

Mary Magdalene had seven demons (Luke 8:2). Imagine that! Seven demons. But then Jesus came along. Seven demons, and then she met Someone who was her friend. I think that those “seven demons” speak of the worst sins you could ever commit. Jesus became her friend, and His friendship brought her out of the demon world into the beautiful world of His friendship. Mary Magdalene became the friend of Jesus.

When Jesus knew that His hour had come, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end (see John 13:1).

Think of all the churches in America and across the world today. These places are filled with every type of person—including you and me. Just think of it. Jesus said, “I love them all. Is there something I can do? I will go to the Cross and lay down My life. I will pay for everything they have ever done. I just want to be their Friend.”

He is our Friend—the one who loves at all times.

Jesus doesn’t say, “I will be your friend if....” No, He says, “I am your Friend. Period.”

The Test of Friendship

Matthew 24:12 tells us that the love of many will “wax cold.” What does this mean? It means that in some cases what appears to be friendship will reveal itself to be something else. The connection was not divine, and it did not have its roots in Calvary. It was not based on the filling of the Holy Spirit.

For many, love will wax cold. Even Jesus said that there will be hardly such a thing as faith when He returns to the earth.

I thank God for each one who has his friendship rooted in Calvary. This kind of friendship is unconditional. This kind of friendship is consistent and unchangeable. I thank God for friends who are faithful to the end. I love to be with friends and look upon their faces. I thank God for the Body of Christ and for the friends God gives me in it—friends from all across the world, from Maine to Florida to California, from Asia to Africa to Europe.

The Bible says that Jonathan purposed in his heart to love David (1 Samuel 20). The Lord was between these two men, and Jonathan wanted to do everything that would benefit David. He understood what God had called David to be, and he understood what it meant to be a true friend.

May each of us discover this truth in a new and deeper way today.

Chapter Two
CONSTRAINED BY LOVE

Pastor Steven Scibelli

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Corinthians 5:14).

What does it mean to be constrained by love? The word *constrained* speaks of being held in on every side. That is important when you think that Moses was called “the friend of God” in Exodus 33:11.

We can be involved in Christian activity in a ministry, and we can be busy with all the details of what that means in our life. But there is nothing that can compare to being the friend of God.

God also said that about Abraham (2 Chronicles 20; James 2). When you think of Abraham, you think of someone who was faithful, but only because his faithfulness was sourced in God’s friendship.

The friendship of God—what an awesome thing!

Many times in our experiences, inside or outside of Christianity, there have been a lot of people we called “friends.” Yet, really, many of these were only relationships. They never became more than relationships on the outside; they never became deep friendships from the inside.

I knew this even when I was overseas for many years. Regardless of personal contact with different people, something real existed where there was the oneness of the Holy Spirit and the eternal purpose of God. There was something that really brought us into eternal friendships.

Isn't this what it ought to be about when church and Bible college and Christian education and missions programs come together? We should go out just looking for friends. I love that. We go out on our outreaches Tuesday nights, Thursday nights, and Saturday mornings. We work our jobs. We are out there, and we are seeking friends.

Friendship is so much more than superficial, outward relationships. There has to be something deep within the soul. So many relationships develop based upon externals. I can relate to someone based upon what I like or what I dis-

like, my past, my interests, where I work. But all of these are based upon the exteriors.

Love Others as Your Own Soul

Between David and Jonathan, there was a love, and it was a love for the soul of the other. Jonathan loved David as his own soul. This included everything about their minds, their emotions, their choices, their consciences, their self-images—everything about them was united in an inward life that was tied to Jesus Christ.

Jesus could call Judas “friend.” He looked at those who ran away from the Cross and called them friends. Peter the denier was His friend. Thomas the doubter—Jesus called him friend. All of these people deserted Jesus at the Cross. Yet, His friendship remained true because His source was in the very life of God.

Many of the great men of God I have worked with in Africa know the source of true friendship. We know that there will be situations that arise to test our friendships. There will be differences. There will be problems. There will be opposition. There will be things that some of them will not like about me. (I cannot imagine what those things might be, but it is very possible!) In spite of all these things, there is something

among us that goes beyond natural affinity one for another. What we have goes into what is known as true friendship that comes from God. We are friends in the love of God.

A True Friend Tells the Truth

A true friend in the love of God will always be there to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Our exchanges will not be about things that are very abstract, that are without definition. If I love you as a friend, I will tell you the truth in love. If I do not love you as a friend, then all we have is a relationship. And in that relationship I will be afraid, I will have fear, I will have an uncertainty about telling you the truth. A friend who loves can really show me what is happening in our lives together.

My wife, Linda, is more than my wife; she is my best friend. We have been together since 1965, and we have a relationship in which she can come to me and say that something is not right.

Our conversations go like this many times:

“That’s not right.”

“Yes, Lin.”

“How about doing it this way?”

“Yes, Lin.”

“What about this?”

“Yes, Lin.”

“You should look at it differently.”

“Yes, Lin.”

Our relationship is more than a marriage. There is friendship between us. There are so many blind spots in me that she brings in the light.

Friendships sourced in the love of God sustain a marriage. This is what sustains a family. This is what sustains the bond between a pastor and his assistant pastor. This is what sustains a Bible college. This is what sustains a ministry. This is what sustains an outreach. This is what makes a church work. This is the motivation of God’s love in pure, truthful friendships.

There is nothing like this type of friendship.

Who is there that I cannot be a friend to? Jesus could be a friend to Mary Magdalene, to the woman at the well, to blind Bartimaeus, to rich Zaccheus in the tree. He could be a friend to people who were so far from the character of God, and through His friendship He could draw people to the character of God. Christ would initiate the life of God to draw these people. Before they knew it, their eyes were opened. They saw something unique in this Man. There was some-

thing unique, and it was awesome. There was true friendship initiated toward them, and God brought out a response.

Love that is true does not need a response. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “The more I love you, the less I be loved. Yet, I will gladly spend and be spent for you. I am going to go all the way even though there is no response.” (See 2 Corinthians 12:15.) That is friendship. That is what church is all about—friendship. That is what missions is all about—friendship. It is all about friendship from God, to God, to each other, and to the lost.

Chapter Three
A FRIEND OF GOD
Pastor Thomas Schaller

Spirituality, not personality rapport or common interest, is what should govern our friendships. Meeting at the bowling alley, going fishing, talking about computer programs are things that we may like to do. Any field of knowledge can establish some form of connection between people. But one of the phenomena of spirituality is that we can be very diverse and yet have a common source of life running through us. That source of life is the river of God.

I would say that I did not choose my friends; God chose my friends for me. Did David choose Jonathan to be his friend? No, God put it in Jonathan that David would be his friend, and a friend sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). A brother will show up for a barbecue be-

cause he is part of the family. And we do love our families. A friend, however, will cross the hottest desert, climb the highest mountain, and cross the stormiest seas. A friend will show up on your doorstep in adversity, for it says that a friend is born for adversity.

I think of the spiritual friendships that we have in the Lord. I never want to forsake those friends who have been born in the battle. These are friends given to us from God.

But we need to be careful because Proverbs 16:28*b* tells us, “a whisperer separates chief friends.”

Imagine the friendships we have developed over many years, and then these friendships are disturbed. Misunderstandings come by the whisperer who sows discord. We have seen it. Misunderstanding. Misrepresentation. Misinformation. These things put a strain on our friendships.

But that’s okay because Jesus said, “I call you friends” (John 15:15). We would be in real trouble if God did not say, “I am your Friend.”

Abraham is called a friend of God (James 2:23). Do you know what a friend of God will do? He will say to Lot, “Lot, that’s okay. You go over there, and I will go over here. Lot, you go

that way. That's fine. I will go over there."

A friend of God has a great advantage because God shows him His secrets. Jesus says, "I don't call you My servants I call you My friends because I will share My secrets with you." This is a very important distinction.

The Depth of Intimacy

I am sure you have worked for someone who was just your boss. He says, "Sweep the floor." You say, "Why?" He says, "Because I said so! I am the boss." But have you ever been in a workplace where the boss is your friend, and you are a very important part of his life? Sometimes, I am sure, this boss will call you over and say, "I have something to tell you." He is going to tell you from his heart something he is not telling everyone else.

This is the kind of friendship God promises to us. There is a Hebrew word for *secret* that literally means "two pillows." It comes from an old Eastern custom of sitting closely on an arrangement of pillows. The setting would be very intimate and very close. God is intimate with you, and that intimacy goes very far because He shares His secrets with you. When He is your Friend, and you are His friend, you don't

relate to Him based upon the law or upon morality. You do what you do because of your intimate relationship. There is a spiritual intimacy, and your heart burns within you.

We can become very hungry spiritually. I get hungry for the Bible. I even want to pray! I feel like really reading the Scriptures and praying and then hearing more from the Bible. I can't wait to come to church and be fed. I am stirred up.

Why is this? I am alive. Live people get hungry. Dead people are never hungry. They don't need to eat. Living people are hungry, and they eat. We eat at the table of our God who is our friend. He sticks closer than a brother. A brother has to show up, but a friend has the option to be there or not.

God says, "I am your Friend." He did not really need to be. It was out of His own desire and His own love for us that He sent His only begotten Son to purchase us and to redeem us and to fill us and to feed us.

What happens is that we show up for each other because of Christ. I believe I have an opportunity to show myself friendly during these days. I have an opportunity to manifest the love that God has given me. This love can be ex-

pressed to others, even some who may be caught in a trap (2 Timothy 2:24-26). Some fail just because they are human beings. Being human is what human beings do.

“O, Corinthians, why do you walk as men?” Paul asked.

I would answer Paul, “Do you want to know why I walk like a man? It is because I am one.”

But he would answer back to me, “Your calling is not to walk just as a man. Your calling is higher. You are to walk as a son of God” (see 1 John 2:6). Your calling is to walk in His footsteps. He who has friends shows himself friendly.

This means we must break out of the boxes of our wounds and our hurts. We must leave our flesh at the Cross and be Spirit-filled and edifying. Let’s insist upon love and edification because love bears all things, even broken friendships. Love endures all things, hopes all things, and believes all things.

Friendships can be restored; relationships can be healed. Our fellowship is all about God, and He is with us. He is our Friend so that we may be friends to sinners just as Jesus was a friend to sinners. How much more can I be a friend to my brother or my sister.

Confusion and pain can happen when the

whisperer separates chief friends. This means I must be Spirit-filled. This means I must eat at the Tree of Life. This means that my diet must be doctrine. My mind must be enlightened. It means that if God is my Friend, then He is my Friend.

Security Opens the Way for Love

Consider this: Jesus knew that He had come from the Father and was going to the Father. All things had been committed unto Him and given unto Him. Yet, He took the towel and the basin and washed the feet of His disciples. How could he serve them that way? It is because He knew where He came from, and He knew where He was going. He knew that actually everything was His anyway. When you have that kind of security, then your love does not stop, and your attitude is one of love and edification and faith and encouragement and moving in a faith direction.

Now Lot went his way, and Abraham went his way. Actually, Abraham went God's way, for the Lord said to him, "Walk in the land in the height and the breadth and the length of it, for it is yours" (Genesis 13:14-17). But in Genesis 14, Lot was in trouble in Sodom and Gomorrah.

Five kings organized themselves to attack Lot and his people. When Abraham heard of it, he gathered his men together.

He said, "Saddle up, boys; we have to move."

"Where are we going?"

"We are going to deliver my nephew Lot."

"Oh, leave Lot alone. He made a bad decision. I mean, that's *his* problem. He got into it on his own, so let him suffer and live in the consequences of his poor decision."

That would be such a small way to think. We are not into giving an eye for an eye. We are not living under a system of legalism and law. These are not human affairs. This is not a relationship that is based on history. This is based on Jesus Christ.

Abraham and his men got on their donkeys and camels and whatever they were riding and went and delivered Lot. They defeated the five kings. As Abraham returned from his victory, he met the priest Melchizedek, and that was Jesus Christ. It says in Genesis 14, they ate the bread and the blood. That bread and blood speaks of the communion we have in the New Testament. We gather together and say, "God has blessed us. Break the bread and drink the blood, for

Christ is our life.”

We can have a small world in a good way. We can have a world of love and a world of forgiveness, a world of mercy, a world of prayer and faith. Will we speak evil? No, because we live before the High Priest. Will we sow discord? No, not intentionally as far as I know. Hold us accountable, please. Those things are not in our world. We walk as friends of God. And when we are friends of God, we are blessed and we have the power to bless. When we are a friend of God, we show ourselves friendly and we do not give up.

I had a puppy in Hungary. His name was Bootsey, and he would just come and jump on me. I would push him off, and he would come right back. I just couldn't get rid of him. He would just keep coming to me. Often, I would preach with mud on my pants. Bootsey couldn't get enough of me. No way would that dog stop loving me.

When God is our friend, He never fails us. He never forsakes us, never gives up on us, never departs from us. All of His promises are yea and amen. The Finished Work applies all the days of our lives. Even if I fail, we fall into the everlasting arms of our God and our Savior. He

is able to save us to the uttermost. He ever lives to pray for us and makes intercession for us.

We have a fellowship with God who is our friend, and we can be friends—real friends, one to another. A friend will be there. We just keep loving and serving, loving and serving, and going and praying.

Maybe some day we will have to get on our donkeys and ride to someone's rescue. We will show up and deliver him from his problem. A friend simply does not give up. God is our friend, so we show ourselves friendly.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the reason we are here is that Christ is here. That is the only reason. That is how we started out in our faith, and that is how we continue. That is how we will finish. The basis of our relationships has to be nothing less than Him in us. That is the way we want it, and that is the way He wants it. That is the way we received it, and we like it that way. We don't want anything else.

The other kind of thing is very superficial. It is not fulfilling, and it is not satisfying. We want to be Spirit-filled and spiritually oriented in our relationships one to another with the Holy Spirit loving us unconditionally.

God never fails. We are hungry and thirsty for His reality. We want nothing but the Lord in our relationships. We have all failed. But the point is redemption, forgiveness, love, Spirit-led living, truth in the inner man, and spiritual content in our relationships. As a result, we have

doctrinal rapport based upon truth at the Cross.

By these things, we are healed and blessed. We have oneness that is organic. Our unity brings the miracles and healing and blessing and spirituality. The amazing leading of God in the Spirit puts truth and diversity in our Body. That is our calling and our privilege.