

The Winter Is Over

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace World Outreach 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.

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INTRODUCTION

Often you have heard Psalm 118:24 in the Word of God: "This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." But, have you ever considered that there are some folks who live as though it's, "This is the day that Satan has made; let's be miserable in it"? Really! Some people plan on Tuesday to be sick all week. They plan to be defeated, but in a very comfortable way. I believe a Christian has to plan to be spiritual, plan to be an overcomer, and plan to walk in the Lord.

God wants His people to understand what it means to plan to be an overcomer, to purpose to be victorious. Plan to show up for services. God wants His people to plan to be happy, plan to be peaceful, plan to be pure. Plan to be a person who has a smile on your face! That can happen, when you plan on it. The long cold winter is over. Let's plan to enjoy the springtime and all that God has for us.

Chapter One

IT IS TIME FOR THE LORD
TO WORK

“For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;

“The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

“The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away” (Song of Solomon 2:11-13).

“It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law” (Psalm 119:126).

“My times are in thy hand” (Psalm 31:15a).

Picture the Son—the Lord Jesus Christ—along with the Father and the Holy Spirit billions of years ago in the eternal convention in heaven (Acts 2:23), going over the names of everyone who would be born upon the earth. What if the Trinity had made distinctions? What

if God decided to be a “respector of persons,” regarding whom He would love? Would you or I be included? Imagine if they were sitting around discussing individuals as names came up? In His omniscience, the Father might have said, “Shirley’s sins are a lot worse than Stew’s sins, so we can’t love her as much as we love him. And Sherry’s sins are much worse than Shirley’s sins, so we can’t love her nearly as much!”

Wouldn’t that be terrible? Yet, isn’t that exactly the way many of us look at each other? Most people who call themselves Christians have never carefully studied the essence of God’s nature, and they don’t know God’s character of love.

The Truth

Billions and billions of years ago, God decided to bless all of us.

He made a plan to pay for all of your sins.

His plan was for the Son to die on the Cross in your place.

Billions and billions of years ago, the Father determined that His love for each one of us would be equal. God is no respector of persons (Acts 10:34). He determined that no matter how much a person would sin, He would still pay for

each one. Again and again, the Bible says that God is no respecter of persons. To see that kind of love in action among believers today would overwhelm us! A Christian needs to plan to receive that love and to purpose in his heart to live each day as God has made it—to rejoice in this day and be glad!

In heaven, there will be some amazed and astounded people when they stand face to face with Jesus Christ and realize that His love was the same for everyone, in terms of grace. Thank God, the Bible teaches that clearly.

Psalm 119:126 says, “It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law.” I want to encourage you today so you will be strengthened with God. It is time for God to work! Many people have made doctrine void; it has no effect in their lives.

But the people who know how to think with God do not make doctrine void. That is why categorical doctrine is so crucial. It is living by God’s Word—God’s own thoughts—expressed and revealed in His own way, through the Holy Spirit, for every situation: precept upon precept, line upon line (Isaiah 28:9-10).

“It is time for thee, LORD, to work” means that it is time for God to do something He has

never done before in my life so that I will stop making His Word of no effect. I don't have to make doctrine ineffectual! Let's get with it! We don't have to frustrate love, healing, forgiveness, or patience. We don't need to make peace or edification void in our expression.

One well-known Bible college has a rule that students in Homiletics classes may not critique any preacher who speaks in their church or at their Bible college. Furthermore, students may not write down how a speaker might have done something better. The reason for this rule is that the Bible says, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). The president of that school has said, "Critiquing preachers is not edifying, and it does not minister grace to the hearers. Let the world do the critiquing. We will produce the biggest church in America without it!" That's what he said. And he is right. I am not to say one single word that does not minister grace to the listeners or edify the hearer, according to the Word of God. If I do, I am grieving the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30).

"This is the day that the LORD hath made...."
"It is time for thee, LORD, to work...." Consider

those words, meditate on them, and realize this: If I do not make void the Word of God, if I do not nullify how God thinks, then He will work in my life as He has never worked before. How do I make void God's thoughts? By not mixing faith with what I hear (Hebrews 4:2), by not being meek as I listen (James 1:21), and by not responding with physical action to the presence of God and His promises (John 5:6-8; John 9:1-5). It is time for God to work!

My Times Are in God's Hands

When the Bible says that my times are in God's hand (Psalm 31:15), it also says I can bless the Lord at all times (Psalm 34:1), and I can trust in Him at all times (Psalm 62:8). "A wise man discerneth time and judgment" (Ecclesiastes 8:5). It is possible for God's people to experience Him working in their lives in a dynamic way.

But, according to Ecclesiastes 9:12, men do not know their time. This means that I may have a tremendous need; but if I do not know that *this* is the day God has made, then I don't know that this is my time. In Ecclesiastes 9:12c, the Word of God says that in an evil time, men become snared by infectious forces. Time takes advantage of a man who does not know that his time

is in God's hands. That man becomes ensnared when an evil time falls suddenly upon him, trapping him as if in a net.

To have wisdom is to apply specific Bible doctrine in circumstances and to see the Lord at work in our midst. We will discern both the time and judgment, seeing that this is the day the Lord made; and we will hear Him call us to arise and come away with Him.

Chapter Two

RESPOND TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD

In Song of Solomon 2:11, the Bible says that the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. Some of you may remember some devastating winters, when it seemed like you would rather go home to be with God than live. It would be so cold, and then it would grow colder. Then it would become warm, then snow again, and then it would snow some more. I remember one year, I didn't see the sun for over thirty minutes in three months. I would quote verses and claim verses, but still I wanted to see the sunshine! It was so cold—and the cold was penetrating. Psychologically, it does something to a person to go three months without seeing the sun, except for a short measure of time.

When the winter ended, I thought of that great verse: "The winter is over." Then it started raining—rain every day—the whole month of

March. I thought March would show us some sunshine, but it was just rain, rain, rain. Finally the rain stopped sometime in May. “The rain is over and gone”—and there came a beautiful week in New England. At that time, it seemed like August, but it was May. Everyone said we had such a terrible winter that year. But now, we would have such a beautiful summer.

A Time to be Healed

Leaving the weather conditions for just a moment, think of it like this. You have been through a tremendous trial in your life. Your heart has been broken. You have been wounded, and you have been in pain, emotionally. Then you begin to have fellowship with Jesus Christ. God gives you a promise. That promise quickens you immeasurably, and the promise is this: The winter is over! The winter is past, and the rain is over and gone—and you know that it’s true.

Everyone has been through periods in their life when, finally, the winter is over. Some of you are going to experience that today. Others have experienced it during this past year. The winter is over.

A woman had been sick for four and a half

years, and everybody prayed for her. Time went by, and still she wasn't healed—until she came on a Sunday night to our little church in South Berwick where she was gloriously healed. She called me the next day and read these verses: "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth...." The birds are singing, and the turtle's sound is heard in the land (that means a sound of joy). The fig tree is putting forth its fruit, and the vines are putting forth grapes with a good fragrance. The Lord revealed five different things—all beautiful—that mean springtime is coming. After years of being confined to bed, practically speaking, that woman did not make God's doctrine void; rather, she responded to the presence of God.

In another case, I received a call from a dear friend who is a pastor in New York. He had been through a tremendous trial; and, after listening several times to a particular message that ministered to his need, the winter in his soul was over. He did not frustrate the Word of Grace.

It is a beautiful thing when the winter times are over. One of the great things we must realize is that when something like the winter is over, it's over. I wish I could help you to see that

there are times in your life when the winter is over. Your times are in God's hands. This is the day that God made. The winter is over; the rain is over and gone. This is a brand-new era.

Standing on the Promises

If you are looking unto Jesus Christ, there are so many times in life when you will see that the winter is past. Perhaps you have tremendous problems in your marriage. May I encourage you and comfort you? Nobody knows how it will turn out, but I'll tell you this: It is time for God to work for you.

When you ask God to work, be ready for God to work in whatever way He knows is best. Don't tell Him how to work, just accept what He does. It is time for God to work because our times are in God's hands. This is the day that God has made; be glad, rejoice, and relax in it.

There are many beautiful families who thank God for their children. Some of you have had tremendous heartaches because of your children. Some children have crushed their mothers' hearts—mothers who are following Jesus Christ with all their hearts, still believing God for their children. I want to encourage those moms today by saying that I believe *God* brought this mes-

sage. The winter is past. Have you been lonely, with no purpose in your life? The winter is past! Let the flowers come, let the birds sound forth in the land. Let the fruit come from the fig tree and the fragrance of the grape come from the vines. Let God move again. He has a beautiful and precious provision.

First, Put On the Lord

A fellow who was on drugs kept coming to this church; still, he would go back on drugs two weeks out of every month. One day I asked him, "Do you want to know what your problem is? You don't understand how to "put on" the Lord Jesus Christ. You are trying to make no provision for the flesh before you put on Jesus Christ. But you must *first* put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and *then* make no provision for the flesh."

The Bible says that if you walk in the Spirit, you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). But the key is to plan and purpose to walk in the Spirit. God's purpose and God's plan is that we would first put on the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. People who struggle with drugs and liquor and all of these problems try to make no provision for the flesh. They try not to fulfill the

lusts of the flesh, and they end up being defeated.

Anytime I walk in love, I'll not walk in defeat. Anytime I walk in faith, I will not walk in the need of the flesh. Anytime I put on Jesus Christ, I will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. Anytime I walk in the Spirit, I'll not be in bondage to my flesh. God says to purpose and plan to be spiritual. Plan to trust, plan to honor, plan to love.

Plan on Faith Obedience

God's people need to plan their obedience. "This is the day that the Lord has made." If I believe this is true, and if I will rejoice and be glad in it, then I can plan to have a good time this day. Each day we live is a very special day.

There is something else we need to plan. We need to plan to obey God, rather than the instincts of the flesh. Obedience to God is the key to mastering every single thing in our life. You tell me a problem, and I'm apt to tell you, "Obey God, and you will be released." Obedience is the way God releases our mind and emotions. *Obedience*—just plain obedience!

Romans 1:5b refers to faith obedience. Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is the substance of things

hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” When I have faith in my heart, and I confess the things not yet seen, I become accountable to Someone else. I have chosen faith obedience in my heart. Faith obedience will straighten out so many problems in my life—my bondage, my fears, my insecurity. Faith obedience can heal my body and heal me from things that go on in my life. Faith obedience!

Faith has substance, dwelling richly in my heart. The evidence is when I confess what is in my heart publicly, to become accountable to the hearer. When this takes place, I strengthen and reinforce the springtime of my life. The winter is past, the rain is over and gone. Spring is here! Now come the flowers and the birds and the turtle and the figs and the grapes. Now comes the beautiful spring. The winter is gone. Now the beauty and the life of the trees show forth. God wants to teach us how faith obedience can bring the springtime into our lives.

What does it mean to enter into faith obedience? Trust God’s Word, trust God’s character—confess it, get up, and walk! Put on the Lord Jesus Christ so you will not fulfill the lust of your flesh. Walk in the Spirit, and you will not be in bondage to the old sin nature. Don’t live in

your personality, but live with a renewed heart that controls your personality.

Chapter Three

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GODLY BALANCE

There is a beautiful verse in Proverbs 11:1: “A false balance is an abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight.” What is a false balance? Here is somebody who wrote a letter and said, “I don’t like the youth ministry.” The person who wrote that letter doesn’t have a ministry. We have over one hundred outreaches in our church, but that person is not involved in any of them. That is a false balance.

Another person may say to the pastor, “I don’t like your preaching.” Don’t critique the preaching. If you do absolutely nothing with your life with God but stay home and criticize, don’t critique the preaching! I have always said that if you can do it better, try it for forty years! Go ahead! You can only critique a preacher if you prove you can do a better job. You can only critique the youth pastor if you will prove to me

that you are better than he is—and you can't do that. That is a false balance.

A false balance is a husband who doesn't love his wife with Calvary's love, yet he expects his wife to obey him. He starts giving her that verse: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands" (Ephesians 5:22a). Yet so should he love her and lay down his life for her (Ephesians 5:25). A false balance is reading all the verses on healing but not doing a single thing to make a provision to be healed! You read all the verses on how to get victory over liquor, and you don't do one single thing to get victory—that is a false balance.

The Bible says, "Give and it shall be given unto you." So you don't give, but you want God to give it to you. That is a false balance. If I say I want a church that goes soul winning, a church that goes into all the world and preaches the gospel, but I never go on outreach—not once—don't you agree that it's a false balance?

A false balance is an abomination to the Lord. The Hebrew word for *abomination* is *to'ebah*, a word that implies disgust and loathing. Homosexuality is an abomination. Dishonest business practices are an abomination. Engaging in the occult, worshipping idols, offering an impure

sacrifice are all abominations. Not stepping out in faith but staying in your sick bed when God wants to heal you—that is an abomination. Abominations include those activities, characteristics, behaviors that are destructive to your personal health, the family, and society (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Don't live in a false balance. A balance that isn't godly, that doesn't come from God's thinking, is an abomination. The Word of God instructs us to love one another unconditionally. As far as I am concerned, however, I can't love you that way. I try to tip the scales in my favor by rationalizing to justify my behavior toward you. According to the Bible, if I have God's love, I would love everybody and lay down my life for them. If I don't have God's love, and I love some people while I don't love others, I am living in a false balance. The fellow who secretly lives in immorality but believes his church ought to be pure and godly—can you see it? A false balance is an abomination to the Lord.

A Just Weight: God's Delight

The Bible says a just weight is God's delight. Something that has gone through Calvary and comes out through Jesus Christ has the weight

of love, grace, mercy, holiness, purity, and righteousness. A just weight is a delight in God's sight (Proverbs 11:1b).

See that the winter is past; let springtime come. Amen? My winter is past. Your winter has been cold and miserable, filled with terrible finances, heartaches, and, in some cases, an incompatible marriage. You have been through so much, but you have drawn near to God. You have done your best to follow Jesus. You keep right on believing, confessing, and praying. Well, it is time for God to work, and it is time for your winter to be over! Just believe it.

This is the day that *God* made. The devil did not make this day—God did! Evil hasn't framed this day—God has! Relax! God made this day, so be glad in it. This is a brand-new hour for you. Do you see the flowers that have blossomed? Can you hear the birds singing? The sound of the turtle in the land? That means happiness. There is fruit on the fig tree and grapes on the vine.

Only Believe

It is a beautiful thing to know that your winter is past. Early in my ministry, I tried to counsel a man who had a problem in his marriage,

and I brought up that verse. He really had a terrible marriage; it seemed as if nothing was working for him. He was despondent, so I sent him to a psychiatrist, one of the top counselors in the state of Maine, because my counseling didn't seem to help.

Before long, he was back in my office saying that not a single thing was helping. I sat there thinking, "How can I build this guy up? I don't even think he would believe in God's promises at this point!" Nevertheless, I spoke the promises in Isaiah 30:18, Matthew 7:7, and Matthew 21:21 to him. "God is waiting to be gracious to you. Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Say unto this mountain, 'Be removed, be cast into the sea,' do not doubt, and God will do it for you. Whatever you desire, God will do it!"

That fellow said to me, "Did God give you those verses?" I said, "I think so! I didn't make them up. They are all in the Bible." He said, "If God gave you those verses and if I can believe that God gave them to you, then I believe my whole life will change." I took a step of faith and said, "It's all right there in the Bible, and I think God told me to read them to you." He said, "Then I believe!"

After awhile, this man asked, “Would you go out to dinner with my wife and me? Don’t be surprised if we fight during the meal because she would just as soon fight in front of you as she would before God Almighty—and you’re just a sinner!”

So, I went out to dinner with them. (This case ends well, honestly!) We were sitting there eating away. She would growl about something, then he would ignore her, then she would snap; and I thought, Lord, how do you handle this couple? A decade and a half of being miserable—and they both know God, but they just don’t want to quit their fighting.

Finally I said, “I don’t know why, but I think Jesus is coming back someday...soon!” No date setting, but all I could say was, “I can’t wait for Jesus to come back!” Then, that woman, who was saved but who never went to church, said, “Do you think He’s coming back *real* soon?” I said, “Well, according to the Bible, His coming is imminent.” She said, “Boy, would that solve this problem!” I asked if we could pray. I said, “Father, just maybe the Rapture would settle this problem, but like the apostle John of old said, ‘Even so, come, Lord Jesus,’ and quickly! Amen.”

We talked and laughed, and we became good friends. We went bowling together the following week, and then we went out the week after that. Finally, around the third or fourth week, I was preaching a message called “An Interview with Death.” In it, I described a scene where three people are facing death. One person protests that he is not ready, only to hear, “It’s too late. You are going to die.” I described a person who is unsaved, a carnal Christian, and then a spiritual Christian.

Welcome the Springtime

That couple listened to every word. When I was finished, the woman stood up and came forward—she didn’t even wait for her husband. She knelt at the altar, then he came up behind her. It was one of the sweetest, most beautiful reconciliations—and after fifteen years of strife. This is the message that God gave for their marriage: “The winter is past; the rain is over and gone. You are going to enjoy the flowers of spring in your marriage.” That marriage became one of the most precious, sacred marriages ever. They have stood with me through thick and thin. Springtime came into their marriage. Their winter is over.

CONCLUSION

The winter is over! This is the truth—for your family, your health, your finances, your business, your little child's problems. God is waiting to be gracious (Isaiah 30:18). Please remember that! It is time for God to work. I believe it with all my heart. Let the Holy Spirit minister truth to you. Be very personal with God in a positive way.

Some of the greatest times in my life have come after a long winter, spiritually speaking. These are God's words, and they are for you. This is the time for God to work. This is the day that God has made—for *you*. Your times are in God's hands. Believe His Word: The winter is over! Springtime has come.