True Christians,
Stand Up
& Be Counted

Vincent J Stevens
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The context of this book was taken from the sermon of Vincent J. Stevens at Harvest Time Christian Fellowship in Philadelphia, PA.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this book are from the New American Standard Bible.
We are living in an opportune time for the true Christians to stand up, be recognized and be counted...

I state true Christians as opposed to professing Christians, which seem to dominate the Church. A lot of people profess Christianity. Think back to applications that ask you to state your faith. I never knew the purpose of that question because it never seemed to have an impact for school or work. The question would be preceded by race and then religious affiliation. Most people by default would put Christian. I remember marking ‘Christian,’ having not actively attended church for years. If you asked me what Church I belonged to, I used to say my grandmother’s church.

Unfortunately, it appears as if the majority of Christians in the United States are professing Christians. We profess our allegiance to the Church. True Christians are known by the output or mark of Christianity in their lives. For example, you can recognize a true Christian because they pray. Prayer is not something hoped for or desired. Christians pray. Don’t get me wrong, professing Christians are Christians. However, they are immature Christians. They are Christians that are stuck and ineffective. The true Christian does not struggle to pray. A true Christian demonstrates love even when things are not going well, because their love is not subject to external conditions; their love is bound by God.

If God is still God in your life, no matter what you go through, His love still shines. If we are conditional with our love, it may indicate that we are stuck.
Evangelism

Evangelism is evident in the lives of true Christians. It is a mark of true Christians. True Christians share their faith. Unfortunately, the majority of Christians in America have never shared their faith in Jesus Christ. There is something wrong. True Christians reproduce themselves. True Christians are known for their hunger for the Word. They are known by their desire to give God glory with their entire life, not just with their mouths. If true Christians never opens their mouths, you will know that they are true Christians. There is a popular song that says, “they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Sometimes, I have to remind the Church that true Christians are known by their love and not because things are going well. Life can be upside down, but the power of God and the love of God are greater than anything in our lives. If this is true, it outshines everything. It eliminates our excuses. The true evidence of the One in us outshines all our problems. That is the trait and output of the power of God. The power of God is greater, and true Christians do not allow the flesh, this world or their souls, to become overwhelmed. The Greater One lives inside of true Christians. That is why evangelism and displaying other Christian traits are opportunities for us to demonstrate the power and the authority of the Greater One.

Is the Greater One Shining?

The book of James is a fascinating book because it gives instruction, direction and describes the attributes of a mature Christian. People who question their maturity as a Christian should look in the book! The book of James is perfect! Do you control your tongue? James writes about controlling your tongue. Do you gossip, murmur,
complain and question why you are not considered mature? Read James.

James says that you have to control your tongue. Freshwater and saltwater cannot come from the same spring. You cannot shout the praises of God and then murmur and complain the next day. That is not the value or the output of the Christian life. Just think about it, your prayer life, resisting Satan, and all the attributes of a mature Christian, are written about in James. The book of James is about how a struggling group of Christians were subject to persecution, yet responded with maturity. James challenged people who made their circumstances greater than God. He also challenged people who made their financial status and emotional well-being greater than God. James reminded people that the Greater One must shine all of the time!

What is shining from your life? Is it God? If someone were to observe you, could they determine your Christianity or your degree of faith? Or is your faith mere lip service? One thing about professing Christians is that they talk a good game. If someone were to put a checklist beside all the things you speak of, would it match up to your lifestyle? Would you flunk your own test? Think about it from this perspective; we are the answer the world is clamoring for. I observe the political climate
in our country today and it is a circus. I listen to top political officials and ask, ‘what happened?’ Certain statements made, if I did not find humorous, would be scary. However, I do not live with a spirit of fear. No matter who wins in a political election, God is still sovereign. He’s still in control and we are going to be alright! I am not going to respond like the world responds, questioning what are we going to do or entertaining the idea of moving to another country.

Think back to Y2K, some wanted to store up canned goods and water, but it was unnecessary. In the end, we were just fine! I remember the New Year’s celebration countdown at our fellowship. I can remember people looking around as if to see if something was going to happen. In retrospect, as we entered into the New Year, I should have had someone at the electrical breaker box to turn off the lights! I imagine that as we turned the lights back on we would have needed to revive those who had passed out! I actually met a pastor that built a shelter for food for Y2K, and said that his church would be ready. I look at elections, Y2K and other current events all the same, no fear! Remember, God has not given us a spirit of fear. God is sovereign! The worse it gets in the world, the better the opportunity for us, the Church, to show sober thinking and sober behavior. It is truly time for the church to shine!
To know what is right and not do right, to that person it is sin. What is being discussed in this scripture is how to individually respond to God’s will. In the church we say, “Oh, I want to do God’s will! Lord, Your will and Your will alone!” We’ll pray, “Lord, let Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” We say the right things, but our behavior indicates a different response.

**Boundaries**

One of the biggest challenges of the Christian life is boundaries; having a sense of ethics, knowing right from wrong, understanding where the gray areas are, where the ‘line’ is, and knowing how to make a Godly decision in every aspect of life. The Church struggles with these concepts, and what that simply says is that many Christians have not developed boundaries in their lives. Therefore, life becomes one big gray area. Because of ignorance, rebellion, external influences and people pleasing, we fail to establish biblical boundaries. Problems come up when boundaries arise, and too many in the church are quick to yell, ‘legalism’ without truly understanding. If you confuse boundaries with legalism, then you are thereby stating that God is a legalistic God.
When this thinking infiltrates the mindset of the Christian, they slowly lose all sense of boundaries and order; they cast off limitations, and they have a warped view of what is right and what is wrong.

We see this with the same sex marriage issue today. Christians have become so indifferent on the topic of sexuality without boundaries, that we almost allow anything to go and refer to it as love. The Bible is very explicit, very clear, even when it comes to sin. Unfortunately, the church makes it unclear. Today’s climate approves things like lust as long as you do not carry out the act; and condones sex as long as you intend to marry the person. Someone told me, seeking to justify his sin, ‘you always kick the tires before you buy it!’ I never kicked the tires of a car, but that was his thinking. Since he was engaged, he allowed himself to rationalize pre-marital sex.

What have you read? What have you heard? Does your understanding of Christian boundaries come from carnal Christians? If we are going to be people of the Word, we have to be like the Bereans. They wrestled and stood with the Word of God. Saints, there is no gray area here. But there are people coming up with their own sense of thinking, and that is what we like to call ‘out of the box’ Christianity. If the Church does not stand up to truth, no one will. What we see today is a society that’s in turmoil; and with every generation, we seem to go deeper and deeper into turmoil. But where are the people of God? Where is His Church? Too much of the Church is looking for the TV camera. Nationally, our actions say, “If CNN is going to be there, we’ll be there.” Too much of the Church would rather stand and hold up church signs without
producing any action. The same problem still exists generation after generation! Fundamentality, if you do not change the heart of men, you do not change the behavior of men; that goes for African Americans, as well as the men and women in blue. It’s the same problem and same solution for both sides of the fence. There’s no fence to straddle, you’re either for or against. If you are for sin, you’re against what’s right. There are some nice cops, good cops, who still need Jesus. Too often, we’re interpreting life based on the world’s presentation, rather than God’s. So the question becomes, do we really seek His Will or are we seeking what we like that we can call His will?

**God’s Word is His Will**

Saying “the Lord told me” doesn’t replace what the Bible says, but we say it so much as if it gives what we say legitimacy. But can it be validated? Does it line up with the will of God? We tend to say that for things we want, not necessarily things that are His will.

God gives you a choice in life. I’ve shared with my church a number of times about the perfect will versus the permissive will of God. There’s a permissive will of God. This will entails goods things that He allows you to choose. God doesn’t tell you what to eat for dinner. For example, God may just give you vegetables to eat for dinner but His permissive will allows you have some gravy with that dinner! He doesn’t tell us what to eat and what not to eat. There was a time when He did that under the Covenant but He’s not doing that anymore. You have choices. Your biggest choice is will you adhere to God’s will for your life? Will you just pursue your will and systematically try to label it as God’s will to avoid challenge and accountability? Why are we guessing what His will
is when it’s in His Word? That’s what He gave it to us for. When we question if something is God’s will or not, we should open the Word and see! Second Peter 1:19 says that ‘we have the prophetic word made more sure’. Your answer is right in the Word. You can count on the Word! You can live on the Word. Otherwise, it’s like throwing dice, determining what you want to do because it’s comfortable, looks good, may make you feel good, but it’s not good. First Corinthians 10:23 says, “All things are lawful not all things are profitable.” There are things that are okay to do but they’re not beneficial. They don’t promote growth in your life. They don’t enhance. They are not wrong but, when do you mature to the place where you begin to evaluate everything closely? Now there’s a concern for the people who are around you, in public and in private because all things are lawful but not all things are expedient. There are things that I can do, but I don’t need to do or I shouldn’t do because they hinder my growth more than they help it. These things don’t cause me to sin but they don’t cause me to grow either. They tighten up my personal will but they don’t tighten up the will of God in my life. What’s my goal?

**Hidden Power**

Growth is not a feeling. Spiritually, it’s more than that. Growth has output. One of the characteristics of a Christian is the ability to reproduce themselves. Why aren’t you reproducing yourself? Here’s the concern. Reproducing yourself means that you’re making someone just like you.

**Growth is not a feeling.**

**Spiritually, it’s more than that.**
You are well acquainted with yourself. You know your personal, isolated, secret thoughts, complaints, and feelings. The best you can do is to reproduce another person just like that. Our command from God is to make disciples. That means we’ll make people who are just like us. The subtle implication here is that we are growing spiritually.

We live in a culture where it’s okay to just exist and we think that if we’re doing service in the church, we’re just great. That is not the expression of the church. When the church leaves out of a building it is to invade the world’s darkness. We’re on a mission. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 16:18. When we invade the world’s darkness, ‘the gates of Hell will not overpower you.’ As we go out into the world and want to change lives and hearts, Hell can’t stop us. The forces of Hell cannot stop you! It seems that the forces of Hell are working against the church, because many in the church aren’t doing anything. It’s stopping the church. Part of this is an identity problem; many people don’t know who they are. One of the things that should take us into a deeper study of the Word, is finding out who we are! I’m not just Vincent J. Stevens. I exist in a body but, there is a force that’s greater than any other force, living on the inside of me... and it’s slowly oozing out.

I used to work for a well known telephone company at a nuclear plant in Limerick, Pennsylvania. Before I could service the site, there were many clearances and procedures that needed to be done. I spent a week learning ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts,’ what to look out for, danger signs, and that hearing sirens means to run. Run! Run away from
the plant towers. The goal of the nuclear plant is to control the nuclear radiation. It doesn’t want to be controlled. When I was in college at Shippensburg in the 1970s, there were warnings of a meltdown at the plant, and even though we were almost 50 miles away, there were talks of evacuating our college town because if the plant went nuclear there was nothing that anyone could do about it. The radiation was so powerful that it would supersede all the safeguards and boundaries the plant had put in place.

Do you realize that the power that’s inside of you is greater than that nuclear power? As a matter of fact, when it starts to get loose, there’s nothing that can stop it, not even the gates of Hell! Nothing! If it can do that to external things, imagine what it can do to you! When we let the “nuclear power”, or this supernatural power loose, it overwhelms our minds and our thinking begins to change. It overwhelms our heart and our hearts begin to change. It overwhelms our physical body and how we express ourselves begins to change. These are the marks of a true Christian. This leads to another question— are you seeking to do the will of God or are you struggling between your will and His will? If it is God’s will, it’s very easy to measure it by looking at the Word of God.

**God’s Plan or Yours?**

Referring back to James 4:13, we find a common scenario that often exists in the lives of God’s people. We can make plans in life and God has nothing to do with them. His will is not included in our planning process. We put Him on a stamp at the end saying that we can serve God and do our will. Wait a minute! Is what you’re doing a part of God’s will for your life? What is God’s will for your life, now?
I’d like to challenge you with this...it’s not as personal as we always make it. If God’s will is His Word, then what you do with your “personal” life should be measured in the context of the Word.

What are the imperatives and the commands of the Word? *Fellowship*, if this is a problem, you are already in the denial of His will. You don’t have to feel good about what you’re doing! You don’t have to feel great about where you are! You can feel frustrated. The challenge is, where is the evidence of God’s will in your life? Where is it representing itself and how does it bless the people of God, which will therefore bless the world? Where and how does God’s will in your life manifest? Where does it show up? Where does God’s will in your life have impact? Can you substantiate your behavior in the Text?

Not having a prayer life isn’t found in the Text. You’re not honoring God for who He is. Even if your prayers aren’t as eloquent as the brother next to you, who cares? Not God! God looks for your genuine nature and heart! He reads the hearts of men. You might stumble over words and mix things up but God knows exactly what you’re saying. Let me remind you, for those who may be struggling with your prayer life, that prayer is communication with God the Father. I’ll say this again, prayer is simply communication with God. How do you communicate with people? The difference is that God understands you better. Where is it that says that when you talk to God, everything changes and you have to use King James English? Sometimes you stumble when you
speak? It’s talk with God the Father. Don’t try to memorize some prayer that you’ve read in the Bible, sounding like you are a part of King Arthur’s court. No one speaks like that, so don’t pray like that. Let your prayer be sincere. Let it come from who you really are! It’s okay if you struggle with your vocabulary and pronunciations. It’s a struggle to describe things you want to say but when you don’t know what to say, the Holy Spirit intercedes with groaning on your behalf (Romans 8:26). God knows your heart. Trust that He hears you perfectly clear. Stop praying for people and begin to pray for God!

**Sunnyvale**

I once had an opportunity with the telephone company I used to work for to move my family to Sunnyvale, California. It was the opportunity of a lifetime. I turned it down however, because I wasn’t comfortable taking it. When life gets difficult, my wife and I will sometimes think, *what if we had just moved?* That’s the truth! We aren’t perfect! I joke with my church that, if I had took that job, I wouldn’t know any of them. At the time, my wife and I had just started a church in our home. I knew that I was responsible for the church and couldn’t take the job.

My supervisor tried to convince me that there were people in Sunnyvale, California that needed Jesus too, saying that I would have a bigger church to lead. I explained to him that I didn’t have the freedom to go. There was nothing wrong with the job offer. They would have moved my family and our possessions, and given me a down payment for a sizable home. By every earthly standard, this was God! For many, it would have looked like the Lord was blessing me, opening up a door! Stanford University was right in the
neighborhood, suitable for my three children’s college education. My salary would have been much higher. I was told that I could even pick out the car that I wanted to drive! I turned the job down five times! The fifth time, my supervisor offered to send my wife and I on a trip to Sunnyvale for two weeks but, my thoughts always came back to the church that I had just started in my living room.

The church, at that time, sat on our couch and chairs. The overflow seating was our steps. The children’s ministry met in the kitchen, eating food out of my refrigerator…..or Sunnyvale, California. How many people would have said that moving to Sunnyvale was the will of God? I knew that job wasn’t God’s will for my life. Everything would have failed as a result of my decision. We have to get to a place where we define things on a higher level. That’s maturity. We don’t define things by pleasure, the amount of money, how “new” things are but rather, what does God say first and foremost? You have to look past all of the material things and ask, what is His will for my life and for my family?

A few years before I was offered that job, my family had just transitioned from the church where my wife and I were raised spiritually. This new, small church that I was building was a new family for my children and wife. Did I really want to snatch them out of that environment? If this church was God’s will, then I couldn’t despise the small beginning. I couldn’t look at things in the natural and determine it wasn’t working even though that’s sometimes how I felt. After sitting and praying about the opportunity, I didn’t want to speak to a lot of people about the job. I had no peace with it. I remember listening to the radio one day and hearing a message about being anxious for nothing.
That message illuminated in me. I had to consider God in what I was doing. I said to the Lord that my life was no longer my own, but it was His. His will be done, not mine. I had to be willing to separate from things and people, circumstances and situations, which would have impeded my growth in God. It never was an easy decision but I made it. I refused to go on the two week trip to Sunnyvale.

Five times, I turned down the job offer. There were others clamoring for the job. I had a friend in the company from Houston call and tell me that he heard that I turned the offer down. He asked if I was crazy! “Crazy for Jesus”, was my response. I was crazy for the Lord! I realized that the job offer didn’t come close to what the Lord had already done in my life and it was easy to measure! It didn’t come close to my salvation or my freedom! I live free and I can’t put a cost on freedom.

When you do God’s will and see the fruit produced from it, there is nothing else in life that comes close to it! One of the things I realized is that God doesn’t take away the choice of free will in faith. Everything looks good on the other side, but where’s your faith? How much do you really trust God? Refusing that job looked like a foolish decision but it was one of the greatest decisions of my life! I wouldn’t have known any of the members of my church, aside from those who came when we first started the church in my home. The members of my church have blessed my life! I would have missed out. Before I make any decision that deals with my future, I ask God what He thinks first. You should do that same. You should be in pursuit of Him and not of things. I’d rather live poor with God than rich without Him. You could be a very rich and famous person, but
is your integrity worth more than things? Are God’s rewards more than enough? How do you see life? Too many of us see it for the immediate.

**Tomorrow**

We make decisions about our future, but we really don’t have any idea about what our life will be like tomorrow. We all make decisions about our future, but the only one who promises anything about our future is God. When I eliminate God, I know nothing about my future, I’m hitting or missing. The issue again is, are you pursuing you will or God’s? We have to be very careful that we aren’t slapping God’s name on our will but it happens more than we acknowledge. We make decisions and aren’t looking for God, even when we get counsel. Instead, are you looking for someone to make you feel like this is the right way to go? It’s not anyone’s job but yours to find out what’s God part is and what does God want from you. If I’m not successful now, why do I think that changing locations will make me successful now?

Ministry is not being rich. Everyone following Jesus wasn’t rich. Maybe we’re interpreting being rich by money and not by spirit and soul. The book of Third John 2 says, “I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.” To the degree that your soul changes, external things change.
Your soul isn’t going to change unless your spirit is flowing richly. If you aren’t sound in your soul, you can get rich but you won’t know what to do with your riches. Just like many people today don’t appreciate good health. I say this from personal experience. I’ve been through enough health problems to realize that I better appreciate opening my eyes each day because there people that can’t. Many people take health for granted especially in their youth, when they feel invincible. I was twenty before, I felt that way, walking and riding my bike literally all over the city of Philadelphia.

Think about the times when you have money in your pocket. You feel fiscally invisible. The same goes for people’s health, getting up in the morning and eating anything they want. Some get up in the morning eating chocolate cake and wash it down with chocolate milk. When you’re in your twenties, this sounds good but, when you are forty and above, things change. You now only want a thin slice of chocolate cake and to wash it down with water. We’re all getting older and when we get older, we do things differently. I remember telling brothers in my church who wanted to play basketball that I would only play half court, not full court anymore. They were younger and in college. They couldn’t understand at the time. Now they understand and sit on the bench with me, grunting as they sit down! We then transitioned from wanting to play to just watching the game on television because our bodies changed and we adjusted.

**Let the Prophets Speak**

What is fascinating and what should be happening, is a reversal process of this in our spiritual lives. That’s what it means when the Bible talks about older men and older
women, teaching the younger ones (Titus 2:3-8). You might be limited physically but mentally you have riches they can’t even dream about yet. So that they spend their lives properly, teach them how to live ordered lives. Young people sometimes don’t like to listen. Older people sometimes aren’t in the position to share. Some live like young people too, no maturity. All of that comes from not doing the will of God and that results in the world not benefitting from the power that’s within the church.

The church could have done something about the recent elections before it got out of hand but, are we content just to exist? Those days are over; we have to start challenging the church to let its light so shine before men. We have to. First, it’s commanded by our Lord and Savior. Secondly, the world needs us. They need us to be the people of God. In the Old Testament, the kings always consulted with the prophets of God. The prophets, the people who had the will and the ear of God on their lips, could say what God was saying. Countries moved on what the prophets said. It’s time for the prophets to speak... not your will but God’s.
About the Author

Vincent J. Stevens is the founder and Pastor/Teacher of the Harvest Time Christian Fellowship Church located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and radio host of *Teaching the Word*.

Vincent’s powerful teaching ministry is dedicated to addressing critical issues affecting the believer's spiritual growth and character development.

Vincent and his wife Stephanie, reside on the outskirts of Philadelphia and offer continued leadership, direction and hope to their local church. They are the proud parents of three grown children and one granddaughter.

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