

**“When Life Sets You Back, We Value Spiritual Maturity”**  
**Authentic Faith #2**  
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...a new series of messages on Sunday mornings that we have entitled, “Authentic Faith” there is nothing like the real thing. We talked about the fact that in the Bible, in the New Testament in particular; we find a series of letters that God has provided for them. Each letter has a different focus, a different emphasis, but each with the intention of helping us to understand how to live our live our faith in life. Of all the letters we find and read in the Bible, certainly no single letter is more poignant and more practical than the letter that bears the name of its author, James.

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to the Book of James. We will continue our study in that book today.

In some of the New Testament letters we find that they are identified by location. The letter of Philippians was written to the church at Philippi. The letter to the Colossians was written to the church as Colosse. Here we have the letter of James, a very personal letter, written by a man whom I would like for you to know a little bit better.

I talked last week about the fact that mail has changed a lot through the years. In the ancient days, they would use possibly a quill and some papyri to be able to write and to express their thoughts in scroll fashion and pass it among the peoples in the churches. Today we have a new form of mail that is quickly catching on across the nation. It is called e-mail.

In a very real sense I believe the Book of James is some e-mail – it is E for encouragement. This morning I want you to know that you have mail, mail from James. I want us to take time to look and to see what this man, James, has to say. So, if we can open our mail here for just a moment, you will find there is an entire list of letters but, in particular, this letter tells us something about the man who penned it – the author. I want us to read his opening words in James, Chapter 1, and verse 1. He says, I, James, am a slave of God and the Master Jesus. Writing to the 12 tribes scattered to kingdom, hello. Or, greetings, possibly your translation says. It is very interesting to note that James identifies himself as the slave of God, possibly your translation says, as mine does here, the bondservant of Jesus Christ. James could have used many different designations and descriptions to give us insight into himself. If you study the scriptures, you will find that this James was in fact the half-brother of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

You know full well that Joseph and Mary had a son and his name was Jesus. He had an earthly mother but he had a heavenly father. Through the divine intervention of the Holy Spirit of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary, Mary brought forth a son, her first-born, the Bible says very clearly. They called his name Jesus. But, of course, Mary and Joseph went on to marry and to have other children. One of those children, of their natural family and of their natural birth, was James. In a very real sense this James was the half-brother of Jesus. He grew up playing with Jesus.

There is something else we learn as we study the scripture and that is that this James is mentioned in the Book of Galatians and is also mentioned in the Book of Acts as being a very prominent leader in the church in Jerusalem. In fact, in all likelihood there may have been a sense with which James was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. He was a very influential man there among Jewish believers in the city of Jerusalem. But when James identified himself in this letter he did not focus on his relationship with Jesus, his familial relationship, it wasn't biological except for the common mother, the family relationship – he did not focus on that. Nor did he focus upon his prominence and his influence as a leader in the church. Instead when James introduced himself he simply said, I am a servant, I am a slave. I think that tells us a lot about the image and about the attitude of this man. Everything else in his letter is reflective of the flavor that he had describing himself as a servant of God. In particular, in the opening verses of the Book of James, James tells us that he has learned to adopt a certain attitude, not only about himself but also about the experiences that we all face in life.

Let's read together beginning in James, Chapter 1, and verse 2. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience, but let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James was very concerned about those who would read his letter that they would learn how to take the experiences of life, in particular the hard experiences of life, the testing times of life, and that he would allow them to become the places where God's people would become perfect and complete. Now that word perfect is a very significant word. It is not talking about perfection among humanity. It is talking about maturity in faith. What James says is that it is very important in life that as you go through the experiences of life that you learn to let life become a laboratory through which your faith is tested and proven and which your life begins to take the shape of maturity. The word complete that he uses there is a word that means without fragmentation. The nature of the Greek word is the word from which we get our hologram. You know that a hologram is a three-dimensional, three hundred and sixty-degree figure that you can walk around at any angle and you can see it is a complete image. What the Bible is saying here is that even through the hard times of life God wants to work in your life and in my life that we will not just have a façade, that we will not have just fragments, but that we will become complete in Jesus Christ. What James is talking about is maturity.

One of the crucial values for everyone of us who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ is the value of maturity and that the goal of our life would be to allow God to work in us so that we wouldn't just be flash-in-the-pan people who have an emotional experience with God, but that we would be people who have a spiritual stick-to-itiveness, if you will, a spiritual steadfastness that will be proved through all of the windows and all of the experiences of life. The way God develops maturity in his people, just like you and me, is by taking us through some testing times in life.

I have taken a lot of tests in my life. I am sure you have too. Because of my educational background, I have spent a lot of years in school and one of the regular parts of the

regimen of being in school was that process of taking tests because a test helped to determine the competency, the awareness, and the grasp that I had on the information that had been disseminated to me in a particular class and based on a particular subject. All of you have at one time or another taken tests, tests of every kind, of every background, and of every type.

I heard about a young college sophomore who was in the process of preparing for his final exam. He was taking a test in his ornithology class and he stayed up most of the night preparing for this test. It seems that he walked into the classroom the next day and the professor did not have any blue books and did not ask for any blue books to come out to write and respond to the test. In fact, he found that there were no questions, no multiple choice, and no true and false, nothing of that nature. Instead, what he found was that there were 25 pictures of birds all around the room. His challenge was to go around and identify every one of those birds. One problem. The pictures were not pictures of beautiful birds with colors; they were simply 25 pictures of birds' feet. He walked in the classroom, looked at the professor and said, this is ridiculous! He said, nobody could take this test. The professor said, you must, it is your final. The young man said, well, I am sorry but I am not taking a test like this. The professor responded, then you will fail! The student said, fail if I will, I am out of here and he started out the door and the professor said, son, I am telling you that if you walk out that door you have failed. The young man said, I am gone. The professor asked, what is your name? The boy rolled up his pants, took off his shoes, and said, you tell me!

Tests. They come in life. The way God works in our life is to take us through those testing times of life. James tells us some things about these tests. He says here in James, Chapter 1, and verse 2, my brethren, count it all joy when you fall. Literally, what he is saying there is that the tests are sure. It is not that you might happen to take tests, the clarity here is that we will all take tests. It is when it happens to you. Understand this, the tests of life that prove our faith are sure. Not only does he say when you endure but he goes on to say, my brethren count it all joy when you fall into various tests. The idea of falling is the idea of suddenness, that there are some slick spots in life that you don't perceive until you are in the middle of trying to find your balance and suddenly you are being tested. But then he goes on to say, **when** you fall into various trials. They are sure, they are sudden, and they are assorted. They come from all kinds of places. They come in all shapes and sizes. No two tests are alike in life but the reality is that testing times are sure, they are sudden, they are assorted, and they are coming because Christianity 101 is this – God uses the process of adversity to accomplish the purpose of maturity in every one of our lives, the process of adversity – the outcome – the purpose being maturity. James simply says, I want you to learn, I want you to expect, and I want you to know that God uses testing times. God uses the setbacks of life to advance your life and to advance your faith. We cannot avoid them. We cannot skirt by them. We must face them.

So, if the testing times of life are going to produce maturity in you and in me, what are some of the things we need to know and understand? What are some of the responses that we need to develop in our lives as we go through these setbacks that come. In fact, what I am really sharing with you this morning is how can we move ahead even when life

sets us back? I think James gives us several secrets and I am going to work through them very quickly and progressively here. I want you to see them with me.

James, Chapter 1, verse 2 says, my brethren, count it all joy. The first thing that has to happen in my life and in your life, if we are going to move ahead when life sets us back, is that we have to determine our disposition. We cannot determine the circumstances of our life but we can determine the responses of our life, the disposition that we will take. The Bible tells us that God's plan in the midst of adversity for his children is that we are to count it all joy. Now let me be very careful here. The Bible does not say enjoy it. You see, sometimes we seem to think that when the Bible says count it all joy that that is the equivalent of saying, enjoy it. The Bible doesn't tell us that we are to enjoy the hard times and the testing times of life. Instead, the Bible says that we are to look at it with a different lens. We are to look at it with a different perspective rather than simply enjoying it, which we are not going to do often. This isn't the Bible saying, grin and bear it, fake it until you make it! The Bible never calls us upon us to be phony. As a Christian you are going to grieve, you are going to hurt, you are going to struggle, even as I do in my life, but the fact of the matter is that God wants us to choose a different disposition and that disposition is to learn to value the hardships of life because of the character they build in us.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe, one of my favorite Bible teachers, says, our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to count it all joy. If we live only for the present and forget the future, the trials will make us bitter and not better. We have to learn the value of hardships and of adversity that leads us to maturity.

Someone has said, it is not what happens to you in life but what happens in you that really matters. Because, you see, we cannot affect, we cannot know, we cannot determine what will happen to us. What God is saying to us in his Word, through his servant, James, is that when the hard times of life come and they come surely and they come suddenly and they come in assorted fashion, what you do have to determine is your disposition. That you will count it joy when you fall into various trials.

Not only does the Bible say we have to determine our disposition, the Bible tells us that we have to develop our endurance. This thing called the Christian life is not a hundred-yard dash it is a marathon. There is a need for endurance in faith and in believing Christ. That is why everything that is going to happen in your Christian life isn't going to happen in a one hour church service. God is not in the business of giving us microwave maturity. Wouldn't it be nice if you could just say, I am going to church today, I am going to set it for 30 minutes, and I am going to come out, and I am going to be a little bit more mature today. But God does not give us that option. Instead, what we learn in the microwave experience of a sermon has to be played out in the oven of life. Many times there is a slow process of endurance that has to be experienced in our life and that is what he says here, count it all joy when you fall into various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

We see that word patience and we immediately think of waiting. But the Biblical word, the Greek word that is used, is translated as patience in my Bible and possibly your translation is literally the word that means to endure. Endurance is really the true meaning of that word. We are to count it joy knowing that as we go through the tests that what is happening in life is that we are becoming a more enduring Christian because mature people endure. Mature believers endure. You see, when we read the word patience we immediately think of some sort of a passive resignation, like that old song, Que Soira, Soira, whatever will be will be. Don't you ever get the idea that as a Christian that is going to insulate you or isolate you so that you can just que soira, soira through life. No, the idea here of patience in the Bible is of active resolution. It is what you do when you say, beginning January 1, 1999, I am going to lose weight and I am going to get fit and then you go to the fitness center. Instead of the patience that says you just sit around and watch everybody else get fit, it is you going and acting out that resolution in your life as you do training, disciplining, going through resistance, and the repetition of activities and exercising your muscles so those muscles will endure and strengthen.

It was Bible commentator, Chuck Swindoll, who said the muscles of faith never grow apart from endurance. In each one of our lives we have to go through that process of enduring in order that we might be maturing.

There is something else that has to happen in our lives if we are going to move ahead when life sets us back. That is not only that we have to determine our disposition and develop our endurance but we have to discover our limitations. We don't know it all. We do need help. We are not sufficient in and of ourselves. James goes on to say in Verse 5, speaking about going through the hard times, he says, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally and without reproach and it will be given to him. God allows us to go through those pressing moments so that we will call upon him and that we will come to terms with the limitations of ourselves. That is so often the struggle-point because we don't want to ask for help.

Someone has written, prayer is said when the world has gotten you down and you feel rotten and you are too doggedly tired to pray, you are in a big hurry, and you are mad at everybody. Help! That is what we need to pray. We need to stop and say, God, help me! God, teach me to depend upon you. Lord, teach me that my strength is insufficient and that I can't just grit my teeth and tighten my jaw and just move ahead on my own but that I need the divine wisdom of God. Therefore, I have to discover and I have to see the limitations of my life so I will move from my own sufficiency to total dependency upon God.

There is one final thing I want you to see this morning. That is not only do we need to determine our disposition and develop our endurance and discover our limitations, we have to deal with our doubts. James says here, if any of you ask, ask in faith (verse 6) without doubting for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed for let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man and stable in all of his ways. Doubts. There are moments in life when the hardships and the testing times of life would press us to the place of doubts.

What God wants to do in our life is that when we go through the testing times, it is just like if you have ever hung wallpaper and you will find that bubbles get in behind the paper and you have to take a scraper or a brush and press it and press it until finally the bubbles are gone and the adhesion is clean. In the same way, what we have to do is begin to deal with our doubts because we are all so prone to doubting. We are all so prone to having a Christianity that is just like a piece of wallpaper full of bubbles behind it. What we need is the pressure and the presses that will make us come to terms with the contradictory moments of life.

Life can be so contradictory between the things that we know of God and the things that we experience in life. Yet it is only as we wrestle with those doubts and those contradictions and that diversity in life that maturity can really be forged in us. You see, this James, he knew what real life was about. He knew the kind of stuff that you and I both know and experience in our lives as we struggle.

Well, I have told you a little bit about James who wrote this Epistle this morning, this letter. But I have another James that I want you to meet and to know this morning. His name is James Thomas. Most of you do not know his name but all of you will identify with his story. James Thomas is known, to those of us who know him, as Gene Thomas. Just a year ago he retired as the Deputy Director of Operations at Kennedy Space Center in Merritt Island, Florida. What that means simply is that he was second in command behind the Space Center Director at the time of his retirement. Prior to that he was the Director of Safety, Reliability, and Quality Assurance at Kennedy Space Center. He was the Acting Director of the shuttle launch and landing operations for six space shuttle missions between 1985 and 1986. He has received many accolades including the NASA Exceptional Service Medal, the Outstanding Leadership Medal, and the Meritorious Award, just to name a few. While he is a man of great achievement, like James, he is a man of humble servitude to the Lord. His wife, Juanita, is here with him today. Juanita, I haven't spotted you yet, where are you in our service this morning? Would you let me see you? Right back over there, Juanita. They have three children. I will tell you more about that in just a moment but would you welcome Mr. Gene Thomas as he comes to take a moment and to share with you this morning.

Gene Thomas speaking: Let me begin by asking you a question. What things, what events in your life do you remember the most? I remember graduating from high school with 500 people just as the Korean War was coming to an end and what I faced was going away to the service, to fight in a war which, thank God, ended before I had to go. I remember as a nine-year-old boy the day I gave my heart to Jesus Christ, one of the most memorable days of my life. I remember the day, or the evening, that Juanita and I were married. Our pastor had lost the suspenders to his tux and the whole time we were taking our vows he was standing there like this with his elbows holding his pants up. We thought that any minute his pants are going to fall and this is going to be a wedding we would never forget! But we have been married now for 43 years. I remember graduating from college in an old cow barn at Mississippi State University on a June day. There were four days of hard work to receive a degree and 3,000 of us lined up in that old cow barn with a dirt floor, with no air conditioning. I thought we would all faint before the

day was over but it was a memorable day. I remember the first time I gave my first daughter away in a wedding. It is a happy day but boy it is a sad day. I remember standing up for my son when he was wed and then our youngest daughter was wed. It seems that when you get all of your kids married you run out of kids and God blesses you, you don't have to do that anymore. But this Thursday, January 28, coming up, is one day for the last 12 years that I will remember as long as I live. There is not a day in my life that passes that I don't remember January 28, 1986. That is the day the shuttle Challenger exploded.

My job was Launch Director. I was the person who made the final decision to launch the Challenger. I had a lot of help. We were working out of a firing room about as big as your sanctuary and there are 300 engineers that sit in front of the Launch Director's desk, or his seat, and help him make a decision to launch. There are thousands of other people all over the world. There are airplanes in the sky, boats in the ocean, people in Africa, California, Texas, Alabama, all over the world people reporting in to the Launch Director. It is the most awesome job. Every engineer looks for that day that he can be the Launch Director. In 1986 that happened to be the job that I had.

The shuttle is the most technological marvel that the world has ever created. It weighs 4.5 million pounds and when it is launched it develops 54 million horsepower. That is the power of 30 Hoover Dams, almost 400,000 automobiles, enough power is generated to light the lights in the south end of Florida for a year. Usually anywhere from four to eight men sit on board an airplane, basically attached to the shuttle, and fly into space. They orbit the earth every 90 minutes, they travel at a speed of 25,000 feet per second, and they come back and land on a runway up at Kennedy and they are within ten feet of a yellow line that we draw on the runway. I had the tremendous job of being Launch Director.

Back in the backside of the firing room there is a computer that talks to the computers on board and it is that little computer that launches the shuttle. People ask me, did you push the button? Nobody pushes the button. The Launch director tells a young lady what time he wants to launch, she sets the clock, if nobody stops the count, the shuttle launches within ten milliseconds, that is 1,000<sup>th</sup> of a second. That is how close we are to launch. It is a great responsibility. There is a lot of pride in it and I loved the job. I was on top of the world. My family was the most wonderful family. Our church, I was deacon, a leader in the church. Everything was going our way.

The night before launch I came to work at 11:00 in the evening and it was the coldest day I have ever spent in the state of Florida. During the night the temperature went down to 17 degrees. We had what we call a red line, which says you don't launch the shuttle if it is under freezing. I knew right away when I reported in the firing room that we would not launch without the temperature coming up quite a bit. I was hoping that with the sun it would come up. Over the night we had left some hoses running on the pad because we wanted to try to keep the water systems from freezing. We knew that if the water was running, we hoped that the water wouldn't freeze and you have to have thousands of gallons of water to launch the shuttle.

There were three other major problems. There were some temperature sensors that had to be fixed and I made the decision right away that we would not launch the shuttle until those four problems were fixed. I had no idea that there were some problems with the rubber O rings in the solid rocket motors. There were some engineers that knew all about it but they decided that it wasn't important enough to tell the Launch Director about. They made a poor call in judgement.

You may remember that the Challenger crew was the most diverse crew we had ever launched. The pilot and the co-pilot were friends like brothers. Dick Scobey, the pilot, and I had worked together for six or eight years. Mike Smith was a good friend, the co-pilot. From South Carolina, Mike was an All-American boy. He had flown down from Houston in a jet to be at my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party, we were that kind of friends. There was an Hawaiian engineer on board, a real comic. He could stand up and make you laugh for hours. He should have been a comedian. There was a Jewish lady on board, a brilliant scientist. She had a doctorate in electrical engineering. There was a black engineer on board who was a deacon in his church in Houston. There was an engineer with them that was going along for his company; he was strictly working for his company while an astronaut. He was going along to operate an experiment. Of course, you remember there was a schoolteacher, Christa McAuliffe, and we were all looking forward to Christa teaching in space.

We always take the astronauts over to the beach house, as we call it. It is an old house on the beach and we have a barbecue two weeks before launch. I have never left one of those barbecues that I didn't say to myself that I might not see that crew alive again. I remember that as I got into my car that evening and buckled up, I said a prayer for the Challenger crew. I thought, I might never see these folks alive again.

The last nine minutes of the countdown are automatic. If nobody stops the countdown, if the astronauts don't throw the wrong switches, everything goes right on time. That computer in the back of the room talks to the computers on board at a million times per second. One million pieces of information every second. After I spoke one time a little fellow came up to me and said, if you think that is talking fast, you ought to see my wife and her girlfriend when they get on the telephone. Being Launch Director you feel like a symphony conductor. You watch the lights come on and you listen for the beautiful music. Behind you is a big plate glass window and five miles away you can see the shuttle sitting on the pad.

That day after we picked up the count at nine minutes everything went perfectly. There was not a glitch. It is the most tremendous feeling in the world to sit there and watch the shuttle lift off. It was so clear that day in Florida you could have seen a sparrow ten miles away. But I can tell you it is the most devastating, the most horrible feeling, to see an explosion, the shuttle to blow up in your face.

The first thoughts I had were that Dick Scobey saw something wrong and he separated the orbiter and he would fly back and land at the Kennedy Space Center. And then my

heart took over my technical mind. I said, those astronauts can't get off as long as the solid rocket motors are burning and I knew they were dead.

The first thought I had was to pound my fist in my hand and say, Lord, why did you let this happen. Why did you let this happen to me? As clear as can be the Lord spoke to me and said, don't worry my son, I am still in charge of this, I am still in control of this universe, I am still God.

We went into a room, the people in the firing room, and sequestered ourselves and started to investigate the accident. We looked at films over and over. Somebody brought in a truckload of Kentucky Fried Chicken. Nobody opened it. That evening Vice-President Bush flew down from Washington and we all went back into that same firing room and he stood there, I stood by his side as he spoke with tears on his face and told us that our country would support us and that President Reagan was still supportive of the space program.

About 11:00 p.m. we all went home and decided to come back early the next morning. I don't know how I drove home, I had been awake for 24 hours, but I managed to make it to my driveway, 17 miles away. I couldn't get out of the car. My sweet wife and two daughters came out and opened the door and didn't say a word. We went into the bedroom, the master bedroom, and I sat down on the bed and they sat beside me. I can tell you men I cried like you wouldn't believe – 20 to 30 minutes. I just let it all come out. I wasn't crying for the space program or for myself. I wasn't crying for the United States. I was crying for seven people that I knew had met a bad death.

How do you cope with something like that? How does a Christian cope when trauma comes into your life like that? Two verses, Romans 8:38 and 39 have been tremendous to me. "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any other created things shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. You notice that says no created thing. The shuttle was created and no created thing can separate me from the love of God. If you haven't been through something traumatic like that it may come in your life. It may not be big. It may not be historic but the times are there. Because of this accident I am a better person for it. My family is closer. I am closer to the Lord than ever before. A real lesson has been taught. The lesson is that there is no salvation, there is no hope, and there is no faith outside of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A few years ago I was getting ready to speak at a church in Titusville on a Saturday evening. There was a launch the next day. My wife and I were getting ready for bed and I said, I cannot believe there is a launch tomorrow and I am not out there with those guys in the firing room. She said something very wise. She said, 50 years from now it won't matter to you. 50 years from now men will still be trying to learn to make war and to make peace, how to make money, how to go to the planets, but only eternal life is important.

I speak a lot, or used to, for NASA and people always ask me, did you folks really go to the moon or was it a hoax. My grandmother died thinking that we staged all of that. I had an Uncle Eddie who told me that if we didn't stop sending man to the moon that we were going to disturb the tides and that his fishing would go to pot and he would never catch another fish. So, you say, how do you convince skeptics that man has been to the moon? I can assure you that 12 men have gone to the moon, they have walked on the moon, and come back. I wouldn't try to convince you of that. If you don't believe it, you don't believe it. If I wanted to convince you of something it would be simply to convince you that there is eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. I would sum it up in the words of a chorus that I know Sonny sings here a lot. I would try to convince you of these words: He is Lord, He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and He is Lord. He has risen from the dead and He is Lord. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Thank you!

Pastor McKinley is speaking: Life has some incredible setbacks. Maybe your setback isn't one that will be forever etched in history but it is the tragedy that will be defining in your life. In all of our lives there are losses. Over and over it seems that the minus sign goes into the column of life's experience. I want you to know that 2000 years ago God stepped out of heaven and stepped into earth. God walked among men. I want you to know that he went to the cross and that for every point of suffering there is a cross that is etched, the plus sign, of God's love for you. There is no experience of life that can separate you from him. As a believer there is no experience of life that cannot be used by him to create maturity in the image of Christ in you.

I want to ask that heads be bowed and that eyes be closed and no one stirring or moving. This is a very important moment in this service today. As we pause in this moment I just want you to just draw a circle around your chair, around your seat, not around others who are there with you, but just around you today. I want you to ask this question, has there been a moment in my life when I have taken the setback, the setback I had from birth called sin, and given myself to Jesus Christ and allowed him to become my Lord and my Savior? Have I ever settled the issue of eternity and my destiny? If not, right now can be that moment. Right now can be the moment where you simply look to the cross of Jesus Christ and where you can open your heart quietly and privately. Where you can just simply confess with your mouth, dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. Lord I know that I have a setback in me that keeps me from coming to you. But Jesus I come to you right now. I open the door of my heart. I receive you as my Savior and Lord. Come into my life, dear Jesus. Forgive me of my sins. Make me the person that you want me to be. Did you pray that prayer? While heads are bowed and eyes are closed, did you pray that prayer this morning? Maybe no one around you knows it but you know that was the prayer of your heart. If you have just prayed that prayer and invited Christ to come into your life, I want to ask you to do something that may not be easy to do, but it is important. I want you to just let me know that you prayed that prayer. No one is looking just you and me and the Lord. Would you just slip your hand up and then put it down? Just put your hand up and say, I prayed to receive Christ today. Just put it up and down. God bless you, God bless you. Up and down. God bless you, God bless you. Up and down. God bless you. There are others. Just up and then down. Oh how we thank God

for you! How we pray for this moment, this hour, and this service, for God to use his Word to speak to you. What has just happened in your life is the beginning of new beginnings with you. Now life may not be different tomorrow but you will be different. Jesus Christ has come to make a difference in you.

I wonder this morning, could it be that others of you are here and you are experiencing a setback in your life. Maybe your Challenger experience is a marriage that has failed. Maybe it is the loss of a job. Maybe it is a financial reversal that is greater than you could have imagined. Maybe it is a medical report. Maybe you can say to me right now, Pastor, I need prayer this morning for the setback I am going through and that God would use it in my life to bring maturity and rather than me falling and fainting that I would be faithful to Jesus. Pastor, I am a Christian, I know Christ but I need prayer support this morning, would you pray for me? Friend if you are here and you are going through that would you just slip your hand up and then put it down? Just up and then down. God bless you. Just up and down, up and down. Up and then down. God bless you. Lord, you see these hands but oh how much more you see into our hearts. Lord only you can know the battles that are raging inwardly this morning.

I want to thank you today for a testimony of your goodness and your faithfulness even in hard times. I pray, Lord, for that man, woman, teenager, boy or girl who is here today who just needs a fresh sense of your grace and strength and help in their lives. Lord, I pray for them. For those who lifted their hand and for those, Lord, who feel that pressure in their heart this morning. I pray for them, oh God, that they will go forward and think forward in faith and will see you work to bring grace and glory in their lives. But, Father, I pray also for those who prayed to receive Christ this morning. I thank you for the victory in their life. I thank you for this moment of decision. I pray, oh God, that they would begin to take a new course in life because Christ is their Savior and they have brought themselves to the Cross and are trusting in your love, grace, and your forgiveness. Now, Lord, work in our hearts and work in this moment for strength, help, and encouragement for I pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sermon presented by David McKinley with an insert by Gene Thomas.  
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