

Finding Inner Peace,
We Value Intimacy With God

3/21/99

Nothing ever comes to us in life that hasn't first come through his hand and can take us from his arm. I am thankful for his wonderful loving arms.

If I were to ask you this morning to describe what comes to mind when I say the word peace, how would you respond? How would you respond? When you hear the word peace what is the first thing that comes to mind? I know for some who are in this building this morning when you hear the word peace you immediately think about a special place, a place where you can get away from it all. A place where you feel like your head can clear and you can begin to think about where you want to be. When you think about peace you think about this special place. I know for me I have a place where I like to go to get away from it all and I don't think I am the only one who has discovered that place. It is a place that looks something like the picture here on the screen this morning --the Smoky Mountains. I know many of you have enjoyed, as I have enjoyed through the years, making an annual trek at some point in the year up into the beauty of the mountains and being able just to look off at those vast expanses of space and being able to enjoy its beauty. It is an amazing thing, in just a few months you can go to western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, northern Georgia and you will have a hard time finding anything but Florida license plates. So I know a lot of Floridians make their way there.

To some people peace is found in a place. It may not be the mountains it may be the ocean. It may be lots of different places but some people find peace in a place.

Other people when they think about peace what comes to mind for them is the idea of world peace where there is no disruption, where there would be no division, where the world would begin to experience a different kind of condition than ever before. Of course, this has been the cry of the ages but even recently we have seen it in cultures. I know the culture I grew up in was constantly aware of the need for peace. Of course, because of the confusion of the Viet Nam War, there were lots of different issues of peace and this became a symbol of that age and of that day. There was a song that simply said, all we are saying is give peace a chance. So there has been this movement of peace that seems to come and to go, to ebb and to flow, and yet in many people's mind there would only be peace if there could be world peace. So for some people it is a special place and for others it is a condition of the world.

For many people peace is just a state of mind. To them peace is the idea of feeling secure. It may be something that comes when they feel they have amassed a certain amount of money in the bank. It may be something that comes in their life because of what is happening in the relationships they have with members of their family. But to many people peace is simply a state of mind. However, when we take the book that I have at my side this morning, the Bible, and we open that book we find that this book has much to say about the subject of peace and about how we can experience real peace in

life. If there is one thing that the Bible tells us it is that real peace, what peace is intended to be, and the peace that we can know, that real peace is not found in a place or the condition of the world or simply a state of mind. Real peace is the result, the by-product, of a growing deepening relationship with God. That is where peace comes from. There can be a quality of life-experience that takes place on a deepening internal level as we grow in faith through all the different seasons of life. The Bible echoes this testimony that there can be peace in life when you know God and when you experience him in a real and personal way.

I think about Job. His book in the Bible looks like job, j-o-b, but it is Job. Job was a very interesting man. He was a man who was greatly blessed. He had many riches, he had a wonderful family, he had houses and lands and farms, and animals. But there came a catastrophic season in Job's life where he lost his home, where he lost his crops, where he lost his animals, and where he lost his children. It was a horrible day and a horrible moment. There was a significant season of groping that took place in Job's life until near the end he came closer and deeper in his relationship with God. One day Job stood and said, I have heard of you, God, by the hearing of the ear but now my eye sees you. There was a transformation that took place even through some very disruptive and devastating experiences that helped Job to know the peace of God in life.

I want you to know that I do believe this morning that God intends for us to know a peace that far too few of us are really experiencing in life.

Jesus said in John, Chapter 14, verse 27, I want us to look at it. In fact, I want to invite you to read with me from the screen and to read it out loud this morning. What does this scripture say? Let's read it together. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you, let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid." Jesus said there is a tendency to live in fear and disruption and confusion but he said I have come and I am giving you a gift called peace. But you know and I know that far too few of us are experiencing peace in our lives, peace in our families, peace in our churches, and peace in our communities. So we really have to ask ourselves this question this morning, why? Why is it that we are not finding inner peace in life? Well, James answers the questions. James tackles the issue and in much the way that you may have at one time or another looked down on your hand and seen a little detachment of a piece of skin near the cuticle, a little hangnail. You have taken that hangnail and thought I will just snatch that off only to find how quickly it will pull down to the quick, as they call it. James begins to take us to the quick. James begins to bring into focus the specific things that are causing the disruption and the lack of peace in our lives. He identifies those for us this morning. He tells us that in all reality we are the architects of much of our own trouble and we are the masters of much of our own confusion and that we need first to identify the issues that are keeping us from peace and then we need to understand how we can find inner peace with God through a deepening, growing, and intimate relationship with him. Are you ready?

Let's look at James, Chapter 4 together this morning. James, Chapter 4, beginning in verse 1. I have simply found that the text we looked at last week is far too rich for us to

simply go on to the next section so I believe we need to go back this morning and that we need to look again at what James tells us. In James, Chapter 4, and verse 1 he attacks the issue by saying, where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members. You might want to underscore that in your Bible! That war in your members (if you are using the church's Bible don't underscore it but if it is your Bible you can underscore that) the desire for pleasure that wars in your members. You lust and you do not have. You murder and covet and cannot attain. You fight and war yet you do not have because you do not ask. You are looking to the wrong source is what he is saying.

Let's continue reading. "You ask and you do not receive because you ask amiss that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God. Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." Or do you think that the scripture says it in vain, the spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously but he gives more grace; therefore, he says, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble; therefore, submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners. Purify your hearts you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he will do what? Lift you up! God is not interested in you being put down in life. God is interested in lifting you up. God wants to strengthen you. God wants you to have an inner peace for all of the variety of things that you face in life. But from the very get-go, as though it were, James says there are some things that keep us from living at peace. What does he tell us they are?

He tells us first that there is this problem called pleasure that wars within our members. Literally, what he is saying to us is that we are flesh-driven people. There is a war that goes on in the members, the flesh as though it were, seeking its own, seeking gratification, having desire that is unbridled in life, that is constantly burning within us and it is that flesh-driven condition that causes us to not have peace. The word please that is used in this passage of scripture, if you were to trace it back to its root, goes back to a Greek word, hedona. It is the word that we today use in our culture, Hedonism. It is the idea of an unbridled pleasure, someone who is only seeking and only wanting gratification, fulfillment, and they are just constantly being consumed with desire. What James is telling us is that if the policy of your life is simply to seek pleasure then you are never going to know peace because you are not going to find it in gratifying your drives and desires. There is no peace. In fact, what pleasure is is that it is a fire that consumes. The more you fuel it the more it burns and consumes your life. Rather than fulfilling and satisfying and bringing contentment, it is the very enemy of peace and so he says one of the reasons we do not have peace is because there is a war within the members of our body.

Long space of no sound.

(blank) Life is earthbound people that we do not have peace in our lives. One of the causes for lack of peace is because we earthbound people. Now when the Bible says we are not to seek friendship with the world it is not talking about the natural world, the natural universe. The Bible is not saying that we are not to have a love and an affinity and appreciation for the beauty of nature. I hope that this morning when you drove onto the campus and saw the beautiful flowers and the green grass and the gorgeous palm trees and the blue sky that something in you said, man, this is a great day and I am thankful to be alive.

When the Bible says we are not to love the world and have friendship with the world it is not talking about the wonder and the beauty of nature. Nor is it speaking, ladies and gentlemen, about people in the world. That is, the Bible is not telling us that we are not to have friends in the world, that we are not to have association with people who are not believers and who have not come to know Jesus Christ. You say, now wait a minute, are you sure about that? I am absolutely sure about that. The reason I am sure is that Jesus was known as the friend of who? How many in here are sinners? Okay. Jesus is the friend of sinners. When the Bible says you are not to seek friendship with the world it does not mean that you are not to be friends of sinners. We are to be friends with people who need to know Jesus. In fact, if we don't befriend them that we might win them to ourselves that we might win them to Christ, then we will fail to accomplish God's purpose in our lives. So the Bible is not telling us we are not to be friends with sinners, what the Bible is telling us is that we are not to live our lives simply bordered and bounded by the world, the mindset of the world, the thought processes of the world, and the affections of the world. Because to live in this world and put all of our attention and all of our affection on the things of the world is to do exactly what he says in verse 4 – to be adulterers and adulteresses. He is talking about spiritual infidelity. He is saying, do you want to know the way to tear up your soul on the inside as a believer? You say that you belong to Jesus Christ and that you live your life just pursuing the things of the world and he said it is just like having an affair. It is just like infidelity. Someday you are going to come unraveled because of the nature of what you are pursuing is keeping you from intimacy and closeness to the one to whom you are committed. So the Bible tells us that the spirit of God who is in us is jealous in seeking us and drawing us to God. Yet when we are bound by this world, when we are constantly consumed with the things of this life, when we try to find intimate fulfillment in the world, what we have done is we have committed spiritual adultery and we will never know peace by saying that we know God and that we are going to live for everything in this world.

You see, the Bible doesn't portray our relationship with God as though he is a master in heaven and that we are the slaves down here on earth. The Bible does not give the picture that God is some king in heaven and that we are just the lowly subjects down here. The Bible portrays a picture of an intimate personal relationship with God that men and women just like you and me can know God in a personal way in the processes, the highways and byways of life, and God wants to be involved in our lives. When we shut him out because of our lack of faith, when we shut him out because we have turned our affections to the things of this world, then what we have done is we have committed

spiritual adultery and it tears us up on the inside and we wander from God and we live in disruption and a lack of peace.

So the Bible says the reason we do not know peace is because of the war in our members. We are flesh-driven. We do not know peace because of friendship with the world and we are earthbound. But then James goes on to tell us that we do not have peace in our life because too many times we give place to the devil. You say, now where is that? Well, it is not exactly in this passage of scripture but it is in verse 7. It says, "Submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you." All you have to do is cross reference that with the best commentary on the Bible, which is the Bible itself. Look at Ephesians, Chapter 4, look in verse 26 and verse 27 and here is what you will find. It says, "Be angry and sin not. Neither let the sun go down on your wrath nor give place to the devil." Listen to what the Bible is saying. When you and when I, rather than giving control to our life circumstances to God, try to take vengeance, try to take control, try to take charge for ourselves, when we live with attitudes and a disposition of anger and contentiousness, failing to trust God and his judgment, trying to affect our own judgement in righteousness in life, the result of that is we will be distracted, we will be bound, we will be kept from the peace of God in our lives and we will be consumed with our anger and we will give place to the devil. You see, we become devil distracted.

Satan loves do-it-yourself religion. Satan loves do-it-yourself righteousness. What he tries to seek to get us to do on a regular basis is to assume that somehow we can execute the rightness and wrongness of life based on our own ability, our own will, and our own temper. Yet that is the very thing that disrupts our peace because rather than resisting Satan we give place to him in our disposition.

So what is it that keeps us from having peace? Really finding inner peace? It is that there is a war in our members – we are flesh-driven. It is that we have become friends with the world, we are earthbound. It is that we are giving place to the devil and we have become devil distracted. As a result, remember James is speaking to Christians, as a result we are the followers of Jesus Christ and not living in peace. So what should we do?

In verse 7 James just turns the whole thought. He has painted this backdrop in this picture of conflict and confusion and distraction but then he says in verse 7, therefore, let's start talking solution here. Let's start talking about what needs to happen in your life and in my life if the peace of God is going to be known. Let's look at the way in which we can approach the issues of life, each of these issues, and begin to discover peace with God in the inner man. Even more than that, how we can begin to deepen our walk, our relationship with God, how we can find intimacy with God.

What does that word intimacy mean? It means to be familiar. It means to be close. What James lays out for us is some specific action steps toward intimacy with God in our lives. I want us to spend the remainder of the morning in verses 7 through 10 just bringing out of that text what would be the specific steps, the action steps, to intimacy with God so that as you find intimacy with God you will find peace in the inner man.

Here is the first one; recognize that the biggest obstacle to intimacy with God is our own reluctance and resistance. The biggest thing that keeps you and me from having intimacy with God is our own reluctance and resistance. Listen to what J. Oswald Sanders said in his wonderful book “Enjoying Intimacy with God.” Both scripture and experience teach that it is we, not God, who determines the degree of intimacy that we enjoy with him. We are, at this moment, as close to God as we really choose to be. It may be true that there are times when we would like to know a deeper intimacy but when it comes to that point we are not prepared to pay the price that is involved. The qualifying conditions are more stringent and exacting than we are prepared to meet so we settle for a less demanding level of Christian living.

Everything in our Christian life in service actually flows from our relationship with God. If we are not in vital focus with him, everything else is going to be out of focus. But when our communion with him is close and real, it is gloriously possible to experience a growing intimacy with him. You see, ladies and gentlemen, the primary reason that we are not experiencing intimacy in our lives is because so many times we are reluctant and we are resistant. You say how do you know that? Read verse 7 – Therefore submit to whom? God! Why do I need to submit? Because it is my own reluctance and it is my own resistance that is keeping me from experiencing intimacy with him. What that means is simply this; you must release control to God before you will ever receive peace from God. You are not going to have peace with God until you give him the control.

Have you ever noticed the difference that takes place when you are driving a car on a trip? Have you ever been on a trip and you are driving and you are driving down the highway and you have gone 50 miles, 100 miles, 200 miles and then, finally, after driving 200 miles you stop and you move to the passenger seat and somebody else gets at the wheel? Have you ever noticed how much more relaxed you are when you are just the passenger? It is amazing! When you are driving you are tensed and you are focused and you are constantly having to pay attention because you are trying to stay in control. But when you get out of control, when you don't have to be in control, and you give someone else the control you can relax, you can rest, and you can simply take a nap. The same is true in our relationship with God. We have to begin with giving control to him. When we give God control then we can begin to receive from God and the thing that God wants to do is to bring peace, which is the internal result of releasing control to God. Did you hear what I just said? Peace is the internal result of releasing control to God.

Intimacy comes when we begin to meet God, not on our terms but his, and the operative principle of life with God is faith. God wants us to believe him. God wants us to trust him. How many times did Jesus look at the disciples and say, you doubters? You are constantly stirred up because you are doubters. You are living in doubt. Why don't you just give up control and trust me. This is who I am. This is what I am able to do. In each one of our lives there needs to be a moment when we quit resisting and becoming reluctant to God.

How many times have you been in a worship service like this worship service and you were just stirred and moved by the music and the song and inwardly there was a sense in which you were connecting and worshipping God and maybe in that moment you just had a need to close your eyes and sing to the Lord? Or maybe in that moment you just felt the need to lift your hand and say Lord, I do believe that you are powerful, you are able, and just about the time you were there you went, anybody see me? Now I am not saying that when we come together in corporate worship that corporate worship ought to be a show for private worship or a replacement for it. But how many times has the reluctance been ours before God? How many times has God brought an impulse in your life to give and you have immediately said, well, I can't do that, that is too risky? How many times has God brought you to the edge of sharing with someone and you said, well, not now, better time, better situation? Don't you understand that instead of walking and taking that next step in growing with God and becoming closer to him and seeing him work in those circumstances that it is your own reluctance and your own resistance? It is your willingness to stay in control and your unwillingness to give God control that keeps you from experiencing intimacy with him. You see we have to get out of control. The only way that God wants us out of control is not just out of control in general, he wants us out of control by faith, trusting him, stepping out with him, and believing him.

There is something else that we have to learn. That is, if we are going to have intimacy with God, not only do we need to recognize that the biggest obstacle to intimacy with God is our own reluctance and resistance but we need to understand that attempts at intimacy are going to be attacked by the adversary. If you determine that you want to be close to God and experience God's peace in your life, then get ready for a battle. You say, oh, I don't just ask for it and then I am just all peaceful on the inside? No! There is a battle. I can tell you right now that the adversary's chief aim in life is to keep people distracted, to keep people disrupted, and to keep them from finding intimacy with God so they will never know peace and so they will never be a witness or a testimony for God when they go through the storms of life.

There is an unseen world. There is a spiritual world. While I don't for a minute find myself to be a proponent of Flip Wilson theology that simply says, the devil made me do it, I do want you to know that I believe very much that beyond the physical world there is a spiritual world and that there is an adversary, there is an enemy who is at work in that world and his name is Satan and he is doing everything that he can to keep you from intimacy with God. You don't see the spiritual world. You see the physical world but the spiritual world is real. You know, right now there are all kinds of airwaves and signals that are going through this building. In those airwaves and signals there is probably a baseball game going on right now. I am sure there is a golf match that is going on somewhere right now. I am sure that you could watch a drama. You could watch a western. All of those things are going on in this building right now but you don't see them for one simple reason – you don't have a transmitter that can pick them out, distinguish them, and put the signal visually before you. But I will tell you right now that if we hooked into a cable network, we could immediately see on that screen, this screen, and that screen and suddenly have the ability to see new shapes and new images that are real but we don't perceive them right now among us. In the same way there is a spiritual

world and you need to get plugged in to the realization that there is an enemy who is working in the spiritual world around you who wants to keep you from intimacy with God because everything he does is designed to attack and to tear at the fabric of your faith so that you will not know God's peace in your life.

What we have to understand is that we must learn to focus on God's authority and not just on the appearances and the circumstances of our lives if we are to know intimacy with him. We have to focus on God's authority because our adversary is trying to attack us so we have to get beyond the work of the adversary. That is why the Bible says resist the devil and he will flee from you. He is working to try to injure you, to hinder you spiritually. You need to understand that when you see God and by his authority you can begin to overcome those circumstances you are in.

There is a third thing that I want to hasten to mention to you about intimacy with God and peace in life. That is not only for us to realize that the greatest obstacle to intimacy with God is our own reluctance and resistance and to recognize that not only do we struggle with an adversary who tries to keep us from being intimate with God, but here is the third thing I want you to see this morning. Intimacy is God's interest. Intimacy is God's interest.

Listen again to what it says in verse 8. "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." Who is you? Me! Listen to me today. God is interested in intimacy with you. I tell you I cannot really comprehend this thought. I have read it. I have thought about it all week this week but it is still the most staggering thought to realize that God is interested in intimacy with me! God wants me to know him and to experience him! All he is saying to me is come near because if you will come near the Bible says God will not back off, he will come near to you.

We have this sense that somehow if we come near to God he is going to dodge us, he is going to back off and get away. But that is not who God is. The Bible says that the God who has revealed himself in this Book will draw near to you if you will draw near to him. While there may be an adversary who is trying to keep you away, while there is your own reluctance and resistance, what you have to do in your heart is say I want God more than anything else. Though my situation may be hard and though my life and my body may be filled with pain and though I may not understand everything that is around me what I want is I want to know God. The Bible says that you can know this, that God is interested in intimacy with you. It was his initiative in the first place.

Listen to what the Bible tells us in Ephesians, Chapter 2, and verse 13. It tells us that God has offered us access to himself. It says, "In Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near through the blood of Christ. Don't you understand that the whole purpose in Jesus Christ coming to earth is not simply to show us how to live but to bridge the gap between us and God? We don't need Jesus as an example. We don't simply need him as a teacher. We need him because he is the Savior. He is the one who saw that we were far off from God, caught up in our own sin, distanced from him, flesh-driven out of heaven. With one hand he took the hand of man and with the other hand he

took the hand of God and through his death on the cross he brought the two together. With that initiative God said I want you to be mine. I want you to know me. I want you to walk in intimacy with me. Again, it is echoed in the Book of I Peter, Chapter 3, and verse 18. The Bible says Christ died for our sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

Right now I want you to know that no matter where you may be or how far you may be from God, there is a way to God and it is not through the church and it is not through religion and it is not through ritual, it is through the relationship that is available in Jesus Christ when you receive him as your personal Lord and Savior.

Some of you today need to put faith and trust in Jesus Christ and not only for those who have never believed. Let me just put it back in context. He is talking about people who are believers. He is talking about people who know God. I am telling you this morning that if you are a Christian and you do not have peace and you are distanced and you are distracted and you are focused on this earth and you have been giving yourself to the pleasures of the world rather than the things of God, listen to me today. God is saying draw near to me and I will draw near to you. God wants to be close to you Christian. Don't keep him at arm's length.

That brings me to the fourth and final thing that I want you to see this morning and that is that there is not a place or a circumstance in life at which you cannot find intimacy with God because God wants us to come to him and if we will draw near he will draw near to us. The Bible tells us there is not any place or circumstance in life where we cannot find intimacy with God.

I love the way the New Living Translation puts James, Chapter 4, and verse 10. It says, "When you bow down before the Lord and admit your dependence upon him he will lift you up and give you honor." What God is waiting for in my life and in your life, regardless of the circumstance, is that he is waiting for us to confess our dependence and to come to him. I wonder what that circumstance is in your life today. I wonder if it could be today that you are here and you have professed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have believed on his name but today your life has been stained by sin. Because you have been stained by sin, the sin of disobedience, the sin of doing your own thing, could it be that sin has distanced you from intimacy with God and has disrupted your peace? Look at what he says here. After he says draw near to God and he draws near to you, verse 8, he says, "cleanse your hands you sinners, purify your hearts you double-minded, lament, mourn, and weep." He is talking about repentance. He is saying that God wants to make you clean again. God wants to restore you to himself. Don't keep living in the far country.

Growing up I don't know how many times I heard my pastor, Dr. Adrian Rodgers, make this statement. I believe it is one of the most significant statements I have ever heard. He said, the most miserable man on the face of the earth is not the lost man who is outside of Christ, it is the saved man who is out of fellowship with God. The most miserable man is not the man or not the woman, who has never known the grace of God. They are just

living in darkness, living in blindness. It is all they know – flesh-driven, earthbound, devil-distracted. But when you come from the darkness to light and you have begun to walk in the light and to live with Christ and then sin begins to stain and to defile the conscience of your life, that is what brings misery.

This morning, if you are a Christian, I don't care what that stain may be. It may be the stain of infidelity. It may be the stain of pornography. It may be the stain of cheating. It may be the stain of lying. I don't know what it may be but I want you to hear me this morning, you will never find peace outside of Christ but there is peace in Christ if you will bring your stains to him.

I wonder this morning if the circumstance you are facing could be that you are walking down the street called suffering. Is that where you are today? Are you suffering and struggling with feelings so out of control in life?

Just this past week I went to the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast in Fort Lauderdale. Among the many hundreds of people who were there I saw a dear friend who I have not seen in I guess at least five to seven years. His name is David Hamilton. For many years David Hamilton served as the Associate Pastor at the First Baptist Church in Fort Lauderdale along side Dr. O.S. Hawkins. David and Dr. Hawkins had an incredible life and ministry together and then when O.S. Hawkins moved to Dallas, to a church there, David Hamilton went there to serve with him. Early in those months that he was there he was diagnosed with a massive brain tumor and went through a very significant series of surgeries and seizures and debilitations. This past week I saw David. David was standing with a cane and leaning on that cane. As we were talking he couldn't ask me fast enough about how I was doing. Though his speech is now slightly slowed from before he reached up and put his arm behind my head and he said, brother David, I just want you to know I wouldn't trade anything about this disease and this suffering for what it has taught me about Jesus. As I looked at that man that morning I realized he had an intimacy with God that I did not have in my own life. He had a peace and a crisis that so many people can never find when they are angry and when they are resistant and when they are reluctant. I don't mean that he enjoys his suffering. I don't mean he has enjoyed what this has done in his life. But I will tell you that I saw what faith did in that moment and how that intimacy with God brought peace even in the road of suffering.

I wonder this morning in your life, could it be that the circumstance that you are facing is not the stain of sin or the street called suffering? Could it be that in your life it is fear that is causing you to falter, that your life is just consumed with fear and instead of having peace you are just torn up with worry and anxiety? I believe that fear is to the mind what sand is to the eyes. If you have ever had sand and dirt particles fly into your eyes you know that it is so irritating, it is so confusing, you just can't seem to get rid of it. There is just not an ability to get clarity. In the same way, that is exactly what fear does to our minds. Did you know that John tells us over in I John, Chapter 4, and verse 16, perfect love cast out fear? We love God because he first loved us. Frankly, when fears are consuming our lives what it is showing us is that we are consumed with something other than the love of God. You see it is an issue of intimacy. It is not an issue of adversity. It

is an issue of intimacy. There is a need for intimacy with God so that even in the fearful moments of life we can prove his faithfulness.

I wonder if your circumstance could be this morning that you have walked through the doorway of defeat. We have all seen those comic shows where someone runs to a door, opens the door, and assumes that it is going to be an escape only to step out and find that it drops two floors. Sometimes that happens in life doesn't it? We think we find the perfect door of opportunity and we get all excited and we open the door and we step through it only to realize that there is no floor on the other side. What did it say? Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and he will lift you up. Have you fallen? Have you faltered? Have you been defeated? I want you to hear me this morning, God can bring peace to defeat when you know him and when you seek intimacy with him.

I wonder this morning if maybe your circumstance could be that you are standing at the window of brokenness. Some of you in this building this morning are facing a brokenness in your life, you are looking at a glass that at one time looked so promising, so beautiful and today it is just a shattered window pane. Today the jagged reminders are there to show you broken dreams and you are struggling with the brokenness that has come in your life. Many times that can be the very place where we can meet God. The world throws away broken things but God takes them and he remakes them and he uses them.

On Tuesday morning of this past week I awakened and turned on the early news broadcast to learn, as many of you did, of the horrible train accident that took place just outside of Chicago, Illinois. As I looked at those horrible pictures of the smoldering wreckage of the City of New Orleans Amtrak train that was burning and was just disfigured there on the track I thought, as I am sure many of you did, what a terrible tragedy. Over 100 people were injured and numerous people were killed and missing. It was just one of those things that just sort of brought our nation together this week around suffering and tragedy. It was sort of something off and out there until mid morning a conference that I was involved in was disrupted because of the message from my father in Memphis to tell me that my brother's boss, Matt Libscomb, his wife Cindy, and their three girls were on that train in Chicago. I called my brother and talked with him about what he was hearing. Matt actually had been in Memphis. His wife and daughters and another group had gone just for a time of shopping in Chicago and were coming back when this incident occurred. Rick, my brother, began to relay to me that Matt Libscomb's two daughters were two of the girls that were missing. They were 11 and 8 years old, Rainey and Lacey Libscomb.

On Thursday of this past week Good Morning America did a broadcast from northern Mississippi, right outside of Memphis, Tennessee and there they had Matt Libscomb on talking about what had happened in their life and their family. Then the Today Show, the following day, had pictures from their home there and interviewed them and asked them what it was like, Matt and Cindy sitting there with their youngest daughter, Jessie, what it was like to have two members of their family gone. Matt Libscomb, as many of you who may have seen that broadcast know, shared that his greatest frustration was that it was

horrible to talk about the tragedy and that also many times he had tried in the news media over the recent days to express his faith and no one would let him do it and so Katie Couric simply said, what would you like to share? He began to just talk about what Christ meant in his life and his family.

Mid morning that morning, there was a service, a memorial service held in Memphis, Tennessee at the United Methodist Church there for Rainey and Lacey Libscomb. Everyone who arrived there that day received a piece like the one that I have in my hand this morning. This service was broadcast all over the mid-south area and portions of it on the national news. On the inside portion of the remembrance that was put in everyone's hand these words were there: "To our family, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, we want you to know that we feel compelled to offer this word to you that reflects our deepest feelings and convictions. What we have just experienced these past few days and will continue to experience has brought two assurances clearly into focus. The first is that even though we have always rejoiced in the eternal salvation we receive through God's loving provision in Jesus Christ, that amazing gift is now more treasured by us in a way that we could ever anticipate. It now represents our assurance that we will join Rainey and Lacey again in the place that God lovingly provides for those who love and accept Jesus and we know that our girls do. In fact, within the last week they had initiated conversations with us about their salvation and what heaven was going to be like and we know these conversations were a gift from God.

The second is that we now realize how precious a gift God has provided in you, our friends. The outpouring of love, flowers, acts of kindness, calls, and more have been truly overwhelming. More importantly, the prayer support with which you have surrounded and protected us has carried us and it is deeply appreciated. No words can describe the loss we feel for this temporary separation from our precious daughters who we love so much but neither can words describe the comfort and assurance that we will see them again. Our prayer for you is that you too may know the source of our faith.

That was written by a daddy who lost two girls in that train crash this week! I am simply saying to you, ladies and gentlemen, it doesn't matter what the circumstances in life are, you can experience intimacy with God and you can find inner peace. I don't mean life without problems. I don't mean life without struggles, suffering, and pain. But I want you to know that the very thing that has broken you may be the very place where God will meet you. Peace in life comes from intimacy with God. It is intimacy with God that brings inner peace.

I want to ask that heads be bowed and that eyes be closed. Please don't do a lot of stirring. Let's just make this a holy and a private moment to seek the Lord.

I wonder today if you are here and in this place and if in your life you would have to be honest and say there has never been a moment when you have entered into the relationship of peace with God through our Savior, his son, Jesus Christ. I need to make it very clear you can't have the peace of God until you have made peace with God in your life. Peace with God is made in the moment when you come before him and simply say,

Lord, I know that I am a sinner. I know that naturally I am flesh-driven and that naturally I am earthbound. Naturally I am living distracted by the adversary, the devil. But, Jesus, you came that I might have peace with God.

Dear Jesus, I put my faith and my trust in you. Today I open the door of my heart and I receive you as my Savior and Lord. Come into my life, dear Jesus, and bring peace.

I wonder in this quiet and private moment if you have prayed that prayer this morning. If you have, I want you to know God sees you and God is moving and brought you to this moment that you might be able to draw near to him. He has been drawing you to himself. Maybe you are here this morning and you are a believer and you have been distanced by suffering, by sin, by defeat, by brokenness. Maybe this morning this needs to be a morning where you bring that brokenness and that shatteredness to God again and simply say, whatever may be may Jesus Christ be praised in my life. I cannot change the adversity of life but I can choose intimacy with God but today I am choosing that intimacy with God. I am going to go forward following him, obeying him, and trusting him.

Lord, I can only see faces and figures but you see hearts. I know that you are moving and working in this moment and calling men, women, boys, and girls in this place to yourself. So, Father, I simply pray that as I have the invitation even now the opportunity to extend your invitation that Lord, you will prompt and lead and draw to yourself those in whose heart you have been working today for I pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want you to stand to your feet. We are going to close this service by giving a public invitation. It is an invitation to draw near to God. You can do that privately, I understand that, but I want you to know that because I believe that God has been working and I believe in the ministry of the Holy Spirit who works and moves in the hearts of people just like you and me today, I am asking you, I am inviting you this morning to step out from wherever you may be if you have prayed to receive Christ today. If you have questions about how you can know Christ, if you need someone to pray with you about a need in your life, if you need questions answered about church commitment or following Christ in baptism, whatever that need may be pastors of our church are here, prayer partners and counselors are here to encourage you today. This morning I just want to encourage you to come.

Now prayer partners and counselors I want you to lead the way and to be here and to be ready. Then others of you who need to come I want you to come. We won't sing long but we are singing, inviting, and waiting for people to follow Christ. Come. Come just as you are. Follow him right now.

Sermon by Pastor David McKinley
3/21/99