

Drawing Near to God

by Brian Brodersen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of drawing near to God, with the promise that God will draw near to us, and provides practical ways to overcome obstacles and fulfill this invitation.

Duration: 39:49

Scripture: Psalm 63:1-6, Psalm 63:8-9, James 4:8

Topics: "Worship And Prayer", "Seeking God"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor Chuck focuses on the invitation and promise given in James 4:8 to draw near to God. He emphasizes that drawing near to God is not just a preliminary warm-up before the pastor teaches, but an important part of our worship. The congregation is encouraged to seek God early and thirst for Him, recognizing that His loving kindness is better than life itself. The sermon also highlights the joy and satisfaction that comes from praising God and seeking Him, while acknowledging that those who seek to destroy the soul will be defeated, and the king (referring to believers) will rejoice in God.

Transcript

Let's turn now in our Bibles to Psalm 63 for our scripture reading this morning. I'll read the first and the outnumbered verses. Pastor Brian will lead you as you read the even-numbered verses and let's stand as we read the Word of God.

O God, Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee. My soul thirsteth for Thee. My flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.

To see Thy power and Thy glory so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary. Because Thy loving kindness is better than life. My lips shall praise Thee.

Thus will I bless Thee while I live. I will lift up my hands in Thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with morrow and fatness and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips.

When I remember Thee upon my bed and meditate on Thee in the night watches. Because Thou hast been my help. Therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice.

My soul followeth hard after Thee. Thy right hand upholdeth me. But those that seek my soul to destroy it shall go down into the lower parts of the earth.

They shall fall by the sword. They shall be a portion for foxes. But the king shall rejoice in God and everyone that swears by him shall glory.

But the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped. Let's pray.

Father how thankful we are for this opportunity today to gather together as the church your body to seek you to draw near to you and thanking you Lord for that assurance and promise that if we will just draw near to you you will draw near to us and so now Lord let there be that beautiful drawing near our drawing near to you you're drawing near to us as we turn to your word and allow your spirit Lord to work in our hearts through the word today in Jesus name amen you may be seated good morning let's open our bibles to the fourth chapter of James and as was mentioned previously tonight Pastor Chuck will be taking the entire fourth chapter we're going to look at verses four through eight this morning but specifically at the first portion of verse eight to begin with draw near to God and he

will draw near to you here we are given a wonderful invitation and a glorious promise the invitation is to draw near to God the promise is God will draw near to you now if any one of us received a personal invitation from the president to visit the White House or if perhaps the Queen of England personally invited us to dine with her and the royal family at Buckingham Palace I'm sure that we would make every possible effort to comply with their request well one greater than the president and the queen and all the great men and women of history combined has personally invited us to draw near it's really an astounding thing when you think of it that God the one that we were singing about earlier indescribable uncontainable and all of those wonderful things that were declared in that song and

all the things that we know from the scripture about our great God the creator of the heavens and the earth that this God would invite us to draw near to him inviting us to draw near to him with the promise that if we do so he will then draw near to us and so that's what we want to consider today we want to look at how it is that we can draw near to God but before we look at how to draw near to God we need to first of all consider some of the obstacles that we might face in our attempt to draw near now in verses four through eight there are three obstacles that are mentioned to drawing near to God and so we want to look at those potential obstacles beginning in verse four look at what it says do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God whosoever therefore will be the

friend of the world is the enemy with God or the enemy of God so number one obstacle is the world or more specifically friendship with the world now the question arises when the bible speaks of the world in this negative fashion just exactly what what is it referring to what what is the meaning of the world in this sense and it's important for us to understand that it is not the world of nature necessarily unless one worships nature it is not even the world of culture culture referring to say music art literature science and things like that it's not even necessarily that unless of course one is given to worship the culture it is not the world of humanity that is being spoken of unless you worship humanity in some ideological sense the world that James is warning us about can be summed up

in the word godless it is the philosophy that permeates the whole world that says in essence the less of God the better that is I think a good description of the system that is being referred to here when James and some of the other biblical writers are talking about the world in that negative sense it is a system that is driven by fallen human passions the desire for material possessions and the lust for power and position the apostle john defines the world as the lust of the flesh the lust of the eyes the pride of life so that's the world that's being described here now the obstacle is friendship with the world so so what is it to be a

friend of the world well it's to buy into the system it's to live according to the philosophy of the system Paul in writing to the church in Rome he

said to the believers he said do not be conformed to this world and and this is what he's talking about this system literally he said stop allowing the world this godless system to mold you into its image and so that's what we're talking about friendship with the world is living to fulfill your passions living to accumulate possessions living to attain power and position you cannot be a friend of the world and simultaneously draw near to God you see if I if I'm embracing the world if I'm engaging in this system of the world in the sense that I'm buying into it then that is going to be a huge and really an insurmountable obstacle to drawing near to God so the world is a potential obstacle secondly the devil is a potential obstacle the second part of verse 7 says resist the devil the devil

opposes our drawing near to God you know the last thing that Satan wants to see is a man or a woman drawing near to God a man or a woman really deeply seeking communion with God and and fellowship with God the devil is radically opposed to that and I would even say to some extent he's frightened by that because he knows that a man or a woman genuinely drawing near to God seeking to fulfill all the potential that God intends for them the devil knows that this is a threat to his kingdom this is something that's going to frustrate his agenda so the devil can be an obstacle he will tempt us he will seek to discourage us he will try to distract us and of course the devil works in concert with the world he uses many of the things in the world to try to draw us away he uses the circumstances

sometimes of life to try to discourage us he uses the things of the world to hopefully distract us and you know I think in some ways the devil is satisfied if he could simply distract us oh of course sometimes he will attempt to lead us off into serious sin through major temptation sometimes he will come and you know sort of be behind the scenes of certain circumstances that could you know crush us under the weight of the discouragement but I think more often than not just a little bit of distraction works just fine as far as he's concerned so if he can just get us off preoccupied with things that just really don't matter things that really have no eternal value whatsoever he's happy with that but not only is it the world and the devil that are potential obstacles we also have the issue

of the flesh and I think in the second part of the eighth verse that could be addressed there cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double-minded you know it's interesting that out of all three of these potential obstacles the flesh in some ways is the most insidious because the flesh is it resides in us the the problem is within and we have those evil tendencies of the flesh that will seek to just sort of push us in it in the direction other than the direction that God would have us to go rather than drawing near to God those those evil tendencies of the flesh will seek to to move us in the opposite direction of that you remember Paul the apostle spoke of that which I would not that I do and how many times do we find ourselves with the same experience I don't want to

do a particular thing I know it's wrong I know it's not helpful I know it's not beneficial for my spiritual life and I even you know I'm committed I think to you know I'm not going to do this but then I find that I do it again and again and again it's that that evil tendency of the flesh that resides in me but not only the evil tendencies of the flesh but also just the weaknesses of the flesh remember Jesus in the garden with his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane as he was going through that that time of great spiritual distress before he went to the cross and you remember he had that band of disciples with him and he said to them you know watch and pray and you know he left them and went over a short distance from them and there he was crying out to the father and we read in Luke's

gospel that he sweat as it were great drops of blood and then we read that as Jesus would come back to just sort of you know see those men that were with him that on each occasion he found them in a deep sleep and he would awaken them and say wake up and pray lest you enter into temptation and then he said this he said the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak oh how many times have we found that to be the case you know when I think of this invitation to draw near to God there's something in that that's very attractive to me I want to draw near to God oh I think Lord yes I can even you know sort of visualize in my mind that this experience said of just you know rising up early and getting there before the Lord and opening his word and crying out to him and seeking him in prayer

and and yes Lord I want to do that and oh Lord I'm looking forward to those those intimate moments that we're going to have and suddenly the alarm goes off and I'm like oh no Lord Lord could we have you know 10 more minutes let me hit the snooze button and then Lord I promise I'll be up and at it and so I get the extra 10 minutes but then the alarm goes off again and I find myself wanting to get up wanting to seek the Lord wanting to have that communion with him but I find oh the flesh is so weak the flesh is so weak you see these are the things that that are real obstacles to the fulfillment of this invitation so what do we do well if I'm going to draw near to God I've got to overcome these obstacles and I can do so through the grace of God through the grace of God I can reject the world

I can resist the devil as we're told to do right here in the text and I can refuse to allow the flesh to control me God will give me the grace he will supply me with the help that I need as I call upon him so although these are potential obstacles they do not have to keep us back from entering in to the full blessing that God extends to us through this invitation so looking now at the invitation the invitation again is to draw near to God now there are prerequisites to drawing near to God our text tells us one verse 7 submit yourselves therefore to God the first prerequisite to drawing near to God is obedience the Bible says if I regard iniquity in my heart God is not going to hear my prayer we know from that great statement in Isaiah 59 that God's ear is not heavy that he cannot hear his

arm is not short that he cannot save but we're told there that our sins will will separate us from our God our sins will keep us back from the blessing that God wants to pour out upon our lives and so if we're going to draw near to the Lord we've got to be walking in obedience now in some ways it doesn't seem like I even have to would even have to go into much detail on that but there are many people today who somehow have convinced themselves I think more accurately deceive themselves into thinking that it doesn't really matter how I live or how I walk I can still draw near to God a person will come and they've got all kinds of issues in their life all kinds of sin in their life maybe all kinds of hatred of bitterness and they'll come into the sanctuary and lift their hands in worship

and but yet they're not really drawing near to God because of the sin issues I heard of a person just this past couple of days who is living in an adulterous relationship very open and very blatant about it and when challenged by other believers you know what's going on their response was I know God loves me and I know God wants me happy and this makes me happy so everything's fine I'm going to go to church I'm going to keep you know worshipping God just like all of the rest of you and just you know don't bother me with it anymore don't worry about it just presuming that they can continue to draw near to God not so not so there is the prerequisite of obedience we must be obedient secondly we must have faith for without faith it is impossible to please him for he that comes to God must

believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him we're told in Hebrews 11 6 and so we've got to come with obedience we've got to come in faith believing that God has indeed

extended the invitation that God is indeed there to meet with us but then practically how do we draw near what does this look like for us as Christians personally and individually well we draw near first of all as we meditate on the word of God as we meditate on the word of God now remember the Bible refers to Jesus as the the living word remember John says in the beginning was the word the word was with God the word was God and then he tells us and the word became flesh and dwelt among us so Jesus is the living word of God the the scriptures are the written word of God and through the

written word of God we come into communion and fellowship with the living word of God so as I open my Bible as I meditate on the word of God I am drawing near to God this is an opportunity to draw near to the Lord and the Lord is promising that he will meet me in these places as I draw near to him you know sometimes with our our Bibles we sort of sometimes we can get caught up in kind of an academic approach to the Bible you know we're studying it because there's just so much information in there that we need to know for this that or the other thing sometimes we are reading our Bibles and meditating on them not not so much really meditating like we should but we're we're doing it sort of out of duty you know we we know that you're supposed to read the Bible so I've got to get in my

quota of scripture for the day whatever that might be and I come to it and I'm kind of you know hurrying through it and I'm you know thinking okay let me flip the page over here okay I've got a couple more paragraphs and then I'll be done and you know and finally you finish that chapter all right read my Bible today but that's not what God is intending for us when we get into the word rather it's a it's a time of meeting with the Lord and so we're drawing near to God as we meditate on his word of course in prayer we're drawing near to God and that would be our second point and what what is prayer prayer is really it's coming to God it's coming to God with various requests it's coming to God over different matters that we all go through in life but but what it is is it is coming to God so

as I pray as I seek to connect with the Lord and draw near to him prayer is one of those ways in which that actually happens as I'm praying I am drawing near to the Lord praise and worship is another means of drawing near to God you know the Bible tells us that the Lord inhabits the praises of his people and the picture there is really one of as God's people as their praise is lifted up to the picture is the presence of God coming down and and dwelling amongst us now again with praise and worship we can have one or two or one of two different kinds of experiences we can really take to heart what we're singing we can think about it we can say yes Lord this is what I'm expressing to you right now or we can as I have sometimes done we can be singing the song we can be singing it loudly we

got the words memorized and then all of a sudden you find that my mind is a million miles from what I'm actually singing about so you know just because we're singing and praising doesn't necessarily mean we're drawing near to God but if we're doing it sincerely and genuinely and with the the right heart and the in the right focus then again this is a way that we draw near to God so what we do here say for example this morning with the worship team and all that that's not just sort of the preliminary warm-up you know just to kind of get everybody in the mood so you know the pastor can come up and teach it is also a part of our our time to draw near to God but then fourthly in drawing near to God there's something to be said about what we are actually doing here this morning and what we

will do here tonight and what we will do many other times throughout the week not just in this building but in other facilities on the campus but not just on the campus but in homes in different places there's something to be said about the fellowship of the saints you see when we come together collectively when we come together to a place that has been dedicated to the worship of God and the honoring of Christ and

his word this is a place where we can expect to meet with God this is an opportunity to draw near to God now again of course you can go to church and end up not ever really drawing near to God you're just sitting there you're not really engaged in anything that's happening you're just as far as you can tell you're just sitting in a building but if you come with your heart right

this is a building that has been dedicated from its you know initial moment to the glory of God that this is a place where you can meet with the Lord and many of you know that that is a reality because you've experienced it in the Old Testament this was what many of the saints looked forward to as they thought about drawing near to God they thought of it in the sense of the people of God coming together and of course then they would gather together to go to the tabernacle maybe they would gather together to go up to Jerusalem they would gather together ultimately to go to the temple that would have been built but there was this excitement there was this anticipation we're going to meet with God listen to what the psalmist said we read this passage this morning psalm 63 God you are my God

early will I seek you my soul thirst for you my flesh longs for you in a dry and a thirsty land where there is no water so I have looked for you in the sanctuary to see your power and your glory you see the psalmist said it was in the sanctuary I was looking for the Lord to see his power and his glory psalm 73 truly God is good to Israel to such as are pure in heart but as for me my feet had almost stumbled my steps had nearly slipped until I went into the sanctuary of God then I understood so you see the psalmist describes going into the sanctuary and their meeting with God drawing near to God psalm 84 we sang this one this morning how lovely is your tabernacle oh Lord of hosts my soul longs yes even faints for the courts of the Lord my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God for a

day in your courts is better than a thousand better is one day in your courts as we were singing you see this was the expectation of the people of God historically and this should be our expectation today we come together as the body assembling in this building or other similar kinds of facilities we come there to draw near to God now I'm emphasizing this point because there is a movement afoot in the church today ironically that basically says oh you know the way we've been doing church you know for the past few hundred years or whatever it is that they estimate that we've been doing it this way oh you know it's it's all wrong we don't need we don't need buildings we don't need to go to a building there's nothing special about a building we can worship God anywhere and some of them are

actually saying that you know the day of the church as we've known it for so long that day is passing and you're gonna find people moving away from you know buildings and structure and you know we don't even need a pastor they say you know I'll be my own pastor and I'll have church at my own house or I'll go down to the beach I like I like the beach I'll go down there and worship God and you know maybe I'll do it out on the golf course or somewhere you know surely the Lord's out on the golf course but you know people with that mentality here's what you need to know they're not drawing their conclusions from the scripture this is stuff they're just making up as they go because the scriptures talk to us about coming together the scriptures talk about designated places where you can meet

with God now of course you can meet God at any of those other places as well but you can meet him here in a special way because this place and others like it have been dedicated to that very purpose and when somebody says oh we don't need pastors we don't need leadership again what do they do with the the scriptures that tell us God has given some apostles prophets evangelists pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry for the building up of the body of Christ we need to gather together we need to assemble together this is one of the ways that we draw near to God so that's

the invitation draw near to God we can do it through the word we can do it through prayer through praise and worship we do it as we gather together as a fellowship but now here's

the promise and he will draw near to you he will draw near to you I believe that this is God's word for us today as a fellowship as as people here we are you know we're in a new year we're in a lot of new things are going on all around us a lot of new things in the world a lot of new things in our country there's a lot of confusion there's a lot of uncertainty there's a lot of distrust and here we are today we're gathered together what in in light of all of these kinds of things what would the Lord say to us well I believe this is what he would say draw near to me you see that's the answer draw near to me and his promises I will draw near to you God will draw near to us and as we take these means that we mentioned of drawing near to God this is what we find when we get into the word we

find that God will draw near to us by giving us understanding by giving us wisdom by giving us direction by giving us that that sweet consolation that we might need in our hearts or that hope or that encouragement or something how many times has that been your experience you've come to this place you've come downcast you've come confused you've come a burdened or concerned and you sat and as the word was delivered you felt like you were the only person here you felt like the sermon was handcrafted for you that was the Lord meeting with you I was talking to my oldest daughter last night she was telling me about a conversation she was having with my younger daughter a couple of days ago they both were here at the service last night and as Michael was teaching he was saying essentially the

very same thing that my older daughter had said to my younger daughter and my younger daughter turned her and looked and said can you believe that that's what he's talking about you see that's what happens the Lord ministers through his word and you know how it is we open up the Bible we're confused we're distressed we're we're burdened we're fearful or whatever the case might be we open up the word and there's God to speak to us he's drawing near to us we go to him in prayer and what does he do he answers our prayers and as we receive the answer to those prayers that is the confirmation that God is near that he is drawn near in praise and worship how many times have we had that experience where again as we're just surrendering ourselves in praise and worship God brings us his peace he

brings us his comfort he brings us his joy he brings us his assurance his love his presence my wife was telling me that Wednesday we it was kind of chaotic day and chaotic early evening and all of that to the point where she was wanting desperately to get to church but wasn't looking like she was going to make it and all of this and finally she broke away and and there were just a lot of things that were weighing on her heart and she said when she came in and as the worship team was leading she said the Lord just gave her such a peace as she just sat there and and was just really basking in the presence of God that's what happens you see God meets us as we do that and as we come as we assemble together collectively and as I said through the teaching from the pulpit through an exhortation

that's given through a prophetic word through the gifts of the body have you ever had an experience where you come to church and somebody just comes up to you out of the blue and says you know I don't know why I'm going to tell you this but I just feel like the Lord wants you to know and then they tell you and you're astounded because that's exactly what I needed to hear how did you know that that's a that's a word that's given you see those are all manifestations of God fulfilling his promise of drawing near to us so the invitation has been given the promise has been made and now it's really up to us it's really up to us but would anybody in their right mind refuse this invitation you know going back to my little illustration at the beginning you know if you received a personal

invitation from some great person I mean wouldn't you really do everything in your power to make sure you complied with that you know if there was that you know that handwritten invitation I'd love to see you you know whether it be at the White House or the Palace or the Parliament or you know what whatever or you know it doesn't have to be a person like that but you know maybe some famous celebrity is you know they're having a special party for their new film or something like that and you get a handwritten invitation you're gonna whatever you've got planned you're probably going to drop it and say I want to be there but see this is something so far beyond that it that comparison is is weak because this is God this is the creator of the heavens and the earth this is the God that is

incomprehensible and he is extending this invitation draw near to me he's inviting us personal invitation draw near to me and I will draw near to you that is an invitation and a promise that I want to take seriously for this year beginning this week this month let us in light of the invitation draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith let's pray together father we thank you that this is not wishful hoping but this is a real invitation from the living God to come close to experience intimacy to have you Lord speak into our lives to have you Lord answer our prayers to have you meet us with your presence to have you Lord touch us in ways that only you can and so Lord we know those obstacles are there we know that they can potentially hold us back the world the flesh the devil

but Lord we know that the victory is ours so help us Lord to reject the offer of the world to resist the temptation of the devil and to refuse to allow our flesh to control us help us Lord by your grace through your Holy Spirit help us Lord to draw near to you Lord help us to take the time in the word in prayer in worship in fellowship and help us Lord to do it often draw near to us Lord thank you for your grace and this gracious invitation in Jesus name we bless you amen amen let's stand together as you've noted no doubt the message today has been primarily addressed to those of us who know the Lord but perhaps you've joined us today and you don't know him this God that we're talking about this God that speaks to us this God that comforts us this God that touches our lives you you maybe

have heard about him from a friend maybe some childhood memory but yet you can't say that you know him well he's inviting you as well he's inviting you today to draw near and Jesus said it in this way he said behold I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door he said I will come into him and dine with him and he with me so there's that invitation the Lord is knocking and you're you're sensing that you're there's been a frustration in your life and there's this faint thing that's going on where you just you're sensing that that's the knocking and if you are hearing that and if you will respond to that Jesus said if you'll open the door he will come in talking about that communion and he will dine with you there will be that personal intimate experience that's

what he wants you to have so if that's you today you want to receive Christ the pastors are up front they would love to lead you in a simple prayer to receive the Lord to make your way forward afterwards for those of you that are already there with the Lord but maybe you just need some prayer just to help you draw near then again the pastors would love to pray with you for that may God bless you and may he by his grace help us this week today tomorrow the weeks the months and in the years to come to continue to draw near to him and he promises he will draw near to us God bless

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