

The Heart of the Father

Part 1: God WILL Draw Near to you

PETER DEWITT
AGATHOS CHURCH
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Full Text (for reading on your own)

God's Help in Witnessing and Speaking!

The other week Debra reported that she was impressed by how much Holy Spirit helped her when she shared a testimony at church 2 weeks ago. I (Peter) told her “now you know how I do OK!” Mandy (a newer believer) shared that she has been witnessing to some Mormons and has experienced “God’s help” in witnessing! When we step into God’s mission on any level, Holy Spirit will partner with us and enable us to do the work!

More on Deliverance

Have you cast out a demon? Would you like to cast out a demon? Deliverance is Christian recreation. For many years I did not look seriously at deliverance. I had cast out at least one demon as a young believer. But more recently, I got interested in deliverance, experienced some deliverance myself and then started laying hands on people and demons started coming out. Did Jesus commission His believers to cast out demons seemingly every time He sent them out?

You know, sometimes the church is trying to do with counseling what deliverance is supposed to do.

From what I understand historically, during the church’s first millennia, when people were water baptized they often experienced deliverance - that was the norm! That was the church’s expectation. Demons are still at large but we have authority over all the power of the enemy, so let’s have a hay-day!

We don’t have authority because we say “in Jesus’ Name;” we have authority because we are in Him! We don’t have to go around looking for them, but sometimes you do find them and they have to leave when you tell them to.

It’s a lot more fun to be a Christian when you get to play with all the power tools.

There are people who have struggled with things for 20 and 30 years in their life. They’ve never been able to get over it. They were hurt as a kid, a demon latched onto it and they constantly have this recurring tormenting thought and they can’t get rid of it. Your hands and your faith can set them free in moments. I’m not just saying deliverance is fun - it is essential for THEM - it’s Love for us to be

able to lean over and ask them “do you want to be free?” and then tell the demons that have oppressed them to leave.

The other place I go where I tell demons to leave is hotel rooms. When I walk into a hotel room, I am quick to the punch “EVERYTHING OUT. All foul spirits go. I cleanse this bed and bless it. I cleanse this bed and I bless it. Bathroom be cleansed in Jesus’ Name. This is now a sanctuary of the Lord!”

One time I was in Cleveland and I had crazy thoughts all night. All night I had to push those thoughts out ... I even woke up a bit tired from it. I asked God “this is not me - what is going on?” He said “did you cleanse the room?” I said “no.” I was hearing what was still in the airwaves. I was cohabiting with what was there before I got there. That reminded me of how important it is to cleanse the room. It only takes 10 seconds. And then I can leave a different type, a holy type, of residual anointing in the room when I leave!

Some people who are pscyzophrenic, bi-polar, etc. are probably (in my opinion) spiritually gifted discerners. So people are so connected with what’s going on in the spirit and they therefore perceive things so much and they just have not learned to filter their antenna signals according to the Word of God what’s from Heaven and what’s not ... it can actually make someone kind of insane. There is more going on in the spirit than we know about.

We need to be careful that we realize that not every thought that we have is our own. Sometimes we are perceiving things and that’s why Colossians 3 says we need to set our minds above where Christ is because you can perceive things from the 2nd heaven sometimes - where the demons are.

Some Testimonies from Our Trip

Listen to the recording from about 7:30 - 21:00 for testimonies from our 2 week trip out west as a family:

- Led by peace and protected from camping in a rough thunderstorm!
- Awoken by God with full alertness 20 minutes before our alarm to get to a high-demand campsite on-time!
- Intercepted by a fellow camper with info that kept us from a sunset hike with a grizzly bear!
- Awesome conferences! One testimony from that conference was praying for a fire that was approaching a church in calendar ... within hours the fire turned back!
- Documented multiplication of gasoline in rural Kansas!

Strongholds in the LORD!

I heard this at the conference in Wyoming ... When Christians talk about a stronghold they are usually referring to something the devil has done in their life. But the devil is counterfeit who doesn't have a creative bone in his body. I heard at the conference (and believe) that you can create Godly strongholds in your life. Scripture even talks about God being your refuge. The Hebrew for that is "stronghold." When the enemy comes, your stronghold is where you run.

There are strongholds in your life in the Lord that actually keep you safe in your walk. Even if I get confused, I know confusion is not from God and I can get clarity in His Word. But even better than needing to open the Bible for clarity in the moment-by-moment is to have a stronghold in the Lord that I can run to any time of day or night where I find confidence in what I have already developed based on the Word. 3 strongholds for me would be:

- **Grace:** The enemy says "but you did THIS, but you thought THIS" and I don't even need to worry about it. I just retreat to the stronghold of grace and say "thank you God that it's your obedience not obedience." I literally run away from the temptation to focus on my own works and run right back into my familiar stronghold: the finished work of Christ! That's the stronghold in my life.
- (BY CONTRAST) other people can have strongholds in their life that are not of God. For instance they might be nearly professional at unforgiveness. At any given time they are able to get bitter. That's a stronghold. They need that broken for them. BUT, we can have Godly strongholds because He is our stronghold.
- **Peace:** God is at peace with me. This is another stronghold I run to all the time. God is never angry with me (Isaiah 54). I don't go into prayer and try to clean it up so He stops hating me ... I just KNOW that He loves me; He loves spending time with me! That peace I have with God (Rom. 5:1) stronghold in the Lord for me.
- **Joy:** Another stronghold I believe we are supposed to have as believers is joy. Why would we have joy? Because in His presence is fullness of joy! He's always with us and intimate fellowship with Him is always available to us! When we learn to walk in the place of fellowship that becomes a stronghold because we are always overflowing.

So when I heard this concept of "strongholds in the Lord" at the conference I was thinking about "what would be MY strongholds in the Lord" and came up with something like the list above and then remembered something: "*for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but **righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.***" Those are the 3 strongholds! We need to be cognoscente that we are developing strongholds in our life that are the Lord.

We also need to learn to leverage those strongholds. God says “why have a stronghold if you are going to stand outside the fortress and take it on the chin every time?!”

Ignore is a powerful tactic with the enemy. He’s been wanting people to worship him with their attention for years. Your quiet confidence - as evidenced by you blissfully ignoring his lying assaults from with your confident strongholds in the Lord - is a sign to him of his destruction. (See Phil. 1:28 ... it’s good!) I’m righteous by faith, I’m at peace with God, I’m in His presence ... I’m not engaging with those lies!

The Lord has developed a new stronghold (or perhaps just a new facet of an old stronghold) in my life over the past few months. I want to share about that over the next couple sermons.

Abide in Him

If you remember, Megan and I talked about the first characteristic of good discipler being a “vibrant connection with God.” What was our main scripture that we emphasized about that? “

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” (John 15:4-8)

So, there is no fruit apart from connection with God. Brad taught me that 90% of my effectiveness as a pastor would come from my connection with God via time in the Word and time in prayer. (By the way, one of the ways we can fellowship with God is through having fellowship with other believers. 2 Cor. 5 tells us to no longer regard any believer according to the flesh, but instead as a new creation - or according to the spirit. So if I spend time with a believer - especially if they are aware of who they are in Chris - I am actually interacting with Holy Spirit who is resident within them! Fellowship is so important).

In ministry you don’t want to get eaten alive. So, you better bear fruit so that they don’t eat the branch. How do you bear fruit? Connect yourself to the vine!

One way I can tell you how to get connected to the vine is by saying “be in the Word and be in prayer. Don’t forsake fellowship.” For years I’ve heard Brad suggest an experiment to folks about their time in the Word and prayer: (1) for 30 days don’t open your Bible. (2) For 30 days read the New Testament for 1 hour a day out loud. (3) See how you are doing and decide which lifestyle you want to live the rest of your life.

When you are in the Word and in prayer, it will produce connection with God. So there is a place for me to just tell you plainly like that “be in the Word and be in prayer” and I would do well to tell you that. Nevertheless, I recognize that sometimes we struggle to even get to that point.

Does God have Dry Seasons for You?

In John 4:14, Jesus said *“but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”*

Jesus went into the wilderness so you did not have to.

Brian Orme posted this recently and I realized that he had put words to something that I had experienced over time in my walk with God. Christians are talking about wilderness seasons, but He went into the wilderness that you would not have to! Hebrews 4 says there is a sabbath rest for the people of God and it’s talking about the promised land.

Look again at John 4:14. It does not sound like a dry season.

What about John 15:14-8 that we just read. Does it say “abide in Me that you bear much fruit ... except for the times where I purposefully disconnect Myself from you so that you can have a dry season and try to find Me when I’m not to be found?” That’s the theology many believers have. Have you not heard this? Have you not thought this before?

Here’s another one: He said He’d never leave you nor forsake you. He is with us ALWAYS even to the end of the age. That doesn’t sound like “except for the times when I purposefully disconnect Myself from you so that you can’t find me and you are apparently going to learn about Me by Me not being next to you.”

So the first point I want to make is to say “I’m not believing in dry seasons in the Lord.” We’re in the New Covenant. He’s available all the time!

You may say “I need another scripture for that!”

OK, I will! James 4:8 says *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”* Except the times when He’s not going to draw near to you because you are in a desert season and you are supposed to not be connected to the vine in this season and be withered because God wants you to be withered. I just want to cast that thought out of your consciousness unless you have another scripture to challenge what I am saying.

He died to have connection with you! He died to have relationship with you! He sent His Son that you may have eternal life. What’s eternal life (John 17:3)? To know Him! He wants relationship always. There is never a God-designed dry season in your life. Dry meaning “disconnected from the

life-flow of the vine.” He said if we believe in Him, rivers of living water will flow out of our belly! Brian Orme takes it even further: if we come into a dry environment, we are supposed to create streams in the desert like Psalms says.

So the first thing I want to highlight about abiding - if we believe that sometimes He will draw near to us and sometimes He will not draw near to us, we will be very inconsistent in our approach to our relationship with God - not realizing that He said “if you draw near to Me, I WILL draw near to you.” It’s a promise.

How do you abide in Him?

So how do you get to a place of abiding in God? If you are a branch that is not currently consistently connected to the vine, what do you need to do?

You need to draw near to the Vine! Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Do you see it?

I am trying to dive a little bit deeper into this thing of abiding in Christ to create fruitfulness. The biggest mark of Christian maturity (in my experience) is how long of a season of disconnection you will tolerate. When I was young in the Lord I could have 2 weeks where I feel funky but then seasoned people in the Lord may only tolerate that place for 2 minutes or 2 hours and they get away to hear from the Father. Maturity in the Lord draws near to God consistently.

So if you are not abiding in the Lord, you have to draw near. And God has promised that He will ALWAYS draw near to you; He does not have seasons of disconnection for you. But what causes a believer to draw near to God?

If we knew what causes a believer to want to draw near, then we could govern our own hearts to stay in the place of choosing to draw near and thereby choosing to abide in the Lord!

Let’s look at Hebrews 11:6. This is the scripture that these two sermons are going to be based on. *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”*

What causes us to draw near to God? Hebrews 11:6 has an explicit answer! *“... for he who comes to God **must** ...”* For he who draws near to God **must** ... (1) believe that He is, and that (2) He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. This scripture gives 2 characteristics of folks that draw near to God ... and they **must** have these two characteristics in order to draw near to God.

Next time, we are going to talk about those 2 characteristics: that He is a rewarder, and that He is. What does that mean that “He is.” The new stronghold that the Lord has been developing in my life is learning to recognize who He is! The God that you acknowledge is the One that will make your paths straight (Prov. 3:5-6). So who is He?!

No More Ambition

Listen to 45:00 minutes to the end of the sermon for a bit of a “family talk.”