

“The Sanctuary of God (contd): How to be built into God’s house”

What is a Church? Part 8 1 Peter 2:4-5 3-18-2007

Summary: The greatest experience of the presence of God is in the church. We are the bricks of a worship center which is both humbling and exalting. Our significance comes only in our relationship to the other bricks. We will be built into His Sanctuary when we draw near to Him. That is accomplished through prayer, praise, beholding His glory, tasting His goodness, boasting in God, taking refuge in God, fearing God, seeking God, learning of God, seeking reward from God, and repenting - all on the basis of Christ’s merit alone

1 Peter 2:4-10 Coming¹ to Him, a living stone-- rejected by men but chosen and precious to God-- ⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, (are) being built² into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁶ For it stands in Scripture: Look! I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and valuable cornerstone, and the one who believes in Him will never be put to shame! ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe; but for the unbelieving, The stone that the builders rejected-- this One has become the cornerstone, and ⁸ A stone that causes men to stumble, and a rock that trips them up. They stumble by disobeying the message; they were destined for this.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Review

We are studying from Scripture what the Bible says a church is supposed to be. Our method is to examine the 5 major metaphors Scriptures uses for the Church. The first two were that we are the body of Christ and the bride of Christ. As the body of Christ we found that our responsibilities are to properly represent the Lord Jesus, so when people look at us they get an accurate picture of Him. And we are to build one another up so the body reaches maturity so we can do His work. And His work is the dispensing of His grace.

The second metaphor is that of a bride. As His bride our main responsibilities are

- 1) To be faithful to Him
- 2) To be beautiful and delightful to Him
- 3) To be delighted by Him (to love Him)
- 4) To invite others to take delight in Him.

¹ Adv. Ptc. modifying “being built” (which functions as the main verb). The being built is the result of the coming. The idea of coming to Him may be from Ps.34:5 (since the previous verse, 1 Pe.2:3 just quoted from v.8 of that psalm) where the LXX renders the phrase “those who look to Him” as “those who come to Him” (προσέλαθε πρὸς αὐτόν) – 1Pe.2:4 πρὸς ὃν προσερχόμενοι.

² There is no main verb for this participle to modify; therefore I take it as a n independent participle, meaning it functions like a finite verb.

The Sanctuary of God

Last week we looked at the third metaphor, which is the temple (sanctuary) of the Holy Spirit. The Church is the dwelling place of God, and the passages that teach that point to three ways in which the Church is similar to the Holy Place in the Temple:

1) Holiness - We are set apart as especially precious to God and we are to be morally separate from the world.

2) Fellowship with God - God will walk among us like a nearby dad and so our actions are joint work with Him.

That is where we left off. So now let's pick it up where we left off with the third way that we are similar to the Sanctuary in the Temple, and that is, we are the place for worship of the true God.

3) Worship

We are the bricks of a worship center

The greatest experience of the presence of God is in the church

**1 Pe.2:4-5 Coming to Him, a living stone-- rejected by men but chosen and precious to God--
5 you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house**

You are a brick. And only together with all the other bricks do we make up the dwelling place of God. We need to get beyond thinking about our walk with the Lord and our purpose in life in strictly individualistic terms. The gathered assembly of the saints is the place God has chosen to be the greatest headquarters of His presence. That is what Ephesians two means when it says we are all

**being fitted together in Him and are growing into a holy sanctuary in the Lord,
22 in whom you also are being built together to become a dwelling in which God
lives by his Spirit.**

That is exactly the same thing Peter is saying here –

5 you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house

1 Cor.11:18 addresses one of the problems at the church of Corinth, and it says that problem happens **when you come together as a church**. It is when we gather together that we are a church. And when we all come together into one place like this, Scripture has some amazing things to say about that. This passage gives us some insight into what exactly you came to this morning when you came here. Did you know that here, in the church, you can actually have a more profound experience of the awesome presence of God than when the ancient Hebrews approached Mt. Sinai when God gave the 10 commandments? Remember that? God descended upon that mountain with such a mighty manifestation of His presence that it shook the entire mountain to pieces. The sky went black, there were trumpet sounds blasting from out of nowhere, and the place was so holy that no one was even permitted to touch an animal that had touched the fence that was erected at the bottom of the mountain to keep people from getting too close to the presence of God.

When you come to church you are coming to a more direct experience of God than that.

Heb.12:18-24 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹ to a trumpet blast ...

You have come this morning to something much greater than that.

²² you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The heavenly Jerusalem is heaven – the eternal state for the saints. And the church approximates that more closely than any place else. When we sing our songs on Sunday morning there are countless thousands of angels backing us up. These people sitting around you right now are saints. You are rubbing shoulders this morning with immortal beings whose names are written in heaven. Verse 23 sums it up best – when you came here this morning you came to God. The Bible is clear that even though most local churches have serious problems, they are still the main headquarters for the presence of God in this world.

So when people say, “Can’t I just worship God alone in the woods and enjoy the fullness of His presence since as a believer I am an individual temple of the Holy Spirit?” That is exactly the kind of logic Peter is ruling out by using this metaphor. A Temple is greater than a brick. You can experience the presence of God alone in the woods, but not like you can in the church.

God designed for your joy to be full when His grace is flowing through you to serve others – that doesn’t happen when you’re alone. God also designed you to need grace from Him that only comes through the spiritual gifts of all the people in the church – that doesn’t happen when you’re alone either. (Nor does it happen when you come to church but then isolate yourself from everybody.) People who do not immerse themselves in a church either don’t understand or don’t believe God’s promises about how He dispenses grace through the spiritual gifts. If you don’t strongly desire that grace, then something is seriously wrong in your heart.

Beyond all that, there is also a joy that comes from hearing a large number of voices all singing His praises that you can’t get when you’re by yourself. When we pray together in our small groups there are prayers that are said that you need to be a part of, but that you wouldn’t have thought to pray on your own. When you hear the Word of God expounded in person it’s more powerful than listening to a tape. The Lord’s Supper would lose a great deal of its meaning if you did it privately.

Scripture switches so freely back and forth from using the word “church” in the universal sense and in the local sense, that the clear assumption is that if you are a member of the universal Church then you are a part of a local church. There is no category of people in the Bible who are Christians but who have opted out of membership in the Church.

That is why we have the membership structure we have. The membership process at Agape is this: If you claim to be a Christian and you come here you are a member. If we send letters to newcomers it is not going to invite them to become members; it will inform them that they are members.

At this point the thoughtful Christian will probably be thinking that there is a serious disconnect between all those wonderful descriptions in the Bible about what a church is on the one hand, and what churches you have attended actually are in reality on the other hand. Why? Why have none of us ever been to a church that has completely fulfilled these descriptions of what a church is? The answer is in the verb tense of the term “built” in 1Pe.2:5.

Growth

1 Pe.2:5 you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house

The present tense here points to an ongoing process. Churches are uncomfortable places to be because every last one of them is under construction. In verse two he said we are to grow spiritually as *individuals* by craving the pure, spiritual milk, but he doesn't want you to think in individual terms only so he switches metaphors in v.4 so we will understand that we not only need to grow spiritually as individuals, but we also need to grow spiritually as a church body.

Part of the reason we get so frustrated with churches, and why we have such a hard time finding a church we like, is because every church you ever visit is unfinished. The way to evaluate a church is not on whether it is all a church is supposed to be. You don't evaluate a construction project based on whether it has everything a finished building should have. You evaluate a construction project based on the progress of the construction. Don't evaluate a church based on whether it is all a church ought to be; evaluate it on its growth. And I am not talking about numerical growth – I am talking about the progress that church is making toward becoming all a church is supposed to be.

If a church goes from 300 members to 4000 members but during that time makes no progress toward becoming a place where people can experience the presence of God in a greater way that church has not grown at all. But if progress is being made, then don't worry about what's still missing. In a church that is progressing toward the goal of being a greater expression of the presence of God, when you look around that church and see that it is not all that a church is supposed to be - when you see that it is unfinished; still under construction, that should make you happy. Why? Because you are a brick! When you come to a place that is missing a few bricks, that is good news for you if you are a brick.

Humbling and Exalting

Most of us would do very well to spend more time thinking of ourselves as a brick in the wall of the Temple God is building. That is both a humbling and honoring truth. It's humbling because a brick isn't much by itself. In fact, it's nothing. It's not a roof over your head, it's not a wall, it's not a floor, it's not something you can sit on or lie down on - apart from its relationship to the other bricks it's nothing.

But on the other hand, when a brick structure is being built, bricks are very important. Without the bricks you have nothing. So you as an individual are very, very important, *but that importance becomes a reality in your relationship to the other people in the church.*

Fitting together

In Peter's time they built Temples out of huge stones. But they didn't use any mortar. They cut the stones to fit together so perfectly that they didn't need mortar. There is a portion of the wall in Jerusalem that you can visit today and see where there is a stone that is about the size of this room, and there is no point anywhere around that stone where you can so much as fit a credit card between it and the next stone. The integrity of the structure was completely dependent upon how well the stones fit together.

That is the imagery Peter is calling to mind. The integrity, soundness, strength, longevity, and overall usefulness of this church depends upon how each of the stones fits against the rest of the stones. This is not just a place for a whole bunch of individuals to come worship under the same roof like people coming to a restaurant. The process of the spiritual growth of a church is the process of God building you right into those people seated around you. If our lives don't become entangled and intertwined together, then we are not progressing as a church. If our ministries are not interdependent, we are not functioning as a church. When you think about your ministry don't

just think about what your gifts are. Think about how you can adjust the use of those gifts to fit the needs of the rest of the people in the particular church where you are. That is what building with stones is – taking individual stones and fitting them together.

And the more that happens – where all the people are being shaped and chiseled to fit just right against the other bricks, the closer we will get to being functional as the dwelling place of God. That is not to say that you conform yourself to whatever other people want without qualification. All the stones of the building must be laid in line with the cornerstone, which was the stone they used to determine all the angles and lines. And Peter says the cornerstone is Jesus. We will fit together as we should only when we are aligned to the standard of Jesus Christ.

So how does all this happen? How can we become a church where people experience the presence of God and offer pleasing, acceptable worship? There are so many churches where that either barely happens or doesn't happen at all, what can we do to make sure it happens here?

The answer to that question is in verse four.

How to turn bricks into a house (approach Him)

4 Coming to Him, a living stone-- rejected by men but chosen and precious to God--⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house

The word “coming” is a participle that modifies the word “being built” in verse five, which functions as the main verb. So the core of the sentence is:

Coming to Him ... you ... are being built into a spiritual house

The NIV does a good job capturing the relationship of the verbs. It says “As you come to him you are being built into a spiritual house.” Our being built into the spiritual house is a result of our coming to God. So what does that mean? What does it mean to come to Christ?

The word Peter uses is a technical term for drawing near to the presence of God. It refers not only to coming to Jesus Christ for salvation in the first place, but also to seeking intimacy and fellowship with Jesus Christ – which is the whole purpose of our being called as Christians.

1 Cor.1:9 by Him you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

As each of us draws near to God and enjoys fellowship and communion with Him - the more we do that, the more we as a church will be built up by Him into a spiritual house. There are not many churches where you can go in and have an overwhelming sense of the presence of God. But Agape *can be* one if we just do what verse four describes and make it the constant pursuit of our lives to experience fellowship with God every day around the clock. The more we do that as individuals, the more this church will be built by God to be a Sanctuary where people who live in the Denver area can walk in on a Sunday morning and experience the presence of God!

So how do we seek fellowship with God? We spent 15 weeks answering that question in our “How to Love God” series, which I want to strongly urge each of you to listen through. A summary of that much material would be too broad to be of any practical use to you I am afraid. And besides that, as I studied the context of 1 Peter I was struck with the fact that Peter is drawing very heavily from Psalm 34 throughout this whole section. And the more I looked at that psalm the more I realized that whole psalm is all about drawing near to God. In fact there is a good chance Peter took that very word “to draw near” from the Greek translation of that psalm. So let me just give you 11 observations about drawing near to God from Psalm 34.

But before I do that I want to make a suggestion. I promise you that you won't be able to keep all these in your head. For me, even if I just pick one in the morning it's hard for me to

recall it later in the day – much less 11 things. So I recommend that as I go through this list, just try to pick out one or two that are the ones that are *most* needed in your life. Once you get those down, then you can listen to this sermon CD again and get another one to work on.

1. Prayer

The most obvious way to draw near to God in fellowship with Him is through prayer.

⁴ **I sought the LORD, and he answered me**

⁶ **This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles**

¹⁷ **The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.**

You draw near to God through prayer. Saying little sentence prayers all through the day is a good thing to do, but that is not what Scripture means by seeking God with all your heart. We need to follow Jesus' example and have times of extended, intensive prayer in a solitary place away from distractions. How extended should those times be? Well, the Bible describes a number of benefits that are guaranteed to result from fellowship with God. Things like joy (**Ps.16:11 in Your presence is abundant joy**), and peace (**Nm.6:26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace**), and restoration and rejuvenation (**Hos.6:3 He will come to us like the rain, like the spring showers that water the land**), and rest (**1 Jn.3:19 This then is how we ... set our hearts at rest in his presence**), and full satisfaction of soul (**Ps.63:1,5 earnestly I seek you ... My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods**

So how long should you pray? The rule of thumb for me is to stay in my prayer room until I have experienced a deep enough and long enough fellowship with God that I have joy and peace and rejuvenation and rest and the longings and thirsts of my soul are satisfied. That is how you seek the Lord's presence in prayer.

2. Praise

Ps.34:1 I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.

³ **Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together.**

Praise is what happens when you are so delighted by God that the joy comes out of your mouth verbally. A big help in this area is music. Music touches the emotions, and so listening to really good praise music will help you take delight in God. Listening to secular music won't. It might make you feel happy, but not in God. I try to have an extended time of praise at least five days a week. It's a crucial part of drawing near to God.

3. Behold His glory

⁵ **Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.**

God is invisible – you can't see Him with your physical eyes. So when the psalmists talk about looking at God they are talking about the gaze of the soul. To look at the radiance of God means to fix your attention on the attributes of God. An attribute is something wonderful about God revealed in the Bible. The only way to experience God is to experience one of His attributes.

When you first read about an attribute in the Bible, most of the time you know in your mind that it's a wonderful truth. But it doesn't do anything in your emotions. It doesn't cause joy, or peace or hope or zeal or delight. And so you pray, and meditate, and focus, and study, and seek

hard after God until He opens the eyes of your heart to be able to be delighted by that attribute. And when that happens you are seeing the glory of God.

I begin every day with an extended time of prayer and study over some attribute of God from the Psalms. And I stay until I can see. I don't stop until my heart is moved by what is so wonderful about that attribute. Then I set the countdown alarm on my watch for 30 minutes, so every 30 minutes I am reminded to spend the next 30 minutes enjoying God – especially that particular ray of His glory that my eyes were opened to that morning. Nothing has generated love for God in my heart more than doing that.

4. Taste God's goodness

⁸ Taste and see that the LORD is good

Peter quotes that one in the verse right before the one we are studying where he says **Like newborn babies, crave pure, spiritual milk now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.** To taste something means to experience it. You draw near to God when you experience His goodness. One way is what we just talked about – seeing and enjoying His attributes. So, for example, if the attribute for today is God's protective care, then all through the day you are aware of all ways in which you are experiencing His protective care, and you enjoy that as something that is the direct result of the presence of God.

And that part is so crucial. If I find a gift sitting on my desk all wrapped up with a bow, and I think that gift just appeared by chance, I may thoroughly enjoy the gift, but it's not going to help me love my wife more. If I assume it came from Santa Clause, I may love that gift, but it does nothing for my relationship with Tracy. But if she hands me the gift, and it is clearly an expression of her love to me, then my enjoyment of the gift can be an expression of my enjoyment of and delight in her.

That is not automatic. It's still possible for me to thank her for the gift, but then to delight in the gift without really delighting in her love. But the more I see that gift as an emblem of her love so that my gladness terminates not on the gift but on her, that will increase my delight in my wife.

It works exactly the same way with God's gifts. All the pleasures of life are like mailmen carrying a message of love from God. If you enjoy your family and friends and food and possessions and recreation and nature and all the other joys of life, if you enjoy those things in and of themselves – if your enjoyment comes from those things themselves and is dependent upon those things, you are like a woman who gets excited when the mail man comes to her house because she is in love with the mailman, not because he is carrying a letter from her husband who is overseas.

But if you see all of the little pleasures of life as mailmen carrying a message of love from God, so that your enjoyment of those things is a real act of conscious fellowship with God and enjoyment of His love, then you are like a wife who is excited to see the mailman because she is excited about the letter from her husband. So your enjoyment of food or sex or any other pleasure in life can be fellowship with God and worship or it can be love for the world itself which is adultery against God. We draw near to God when we taste of His goodness by being aware of and enjoying God's gestures of love every few minutes in your life.

5. Boast in God

² My soul will boast in the LORD...

When we think of and speak about God as our only confidence, when we regard God as the only foundation of truth and reality and we delight in that, when we regard God as our only badge

of honor and our knowing Him as ultimately the only thing that is good about our lives, that is an act of drawing near to God. When we regard something else as a badge of honor; we are moving away from God.

6. Take Refuge in God

We draw near to God when we take refuge in Him.

⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. ⁸ ... blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

Encamping around you is something God does; taking refuge in that is something you do. We all take refuge somewhere. Life is full of dangers and threats - things that threaten to kill us, things that threaten to hurt us, things that threaten to take away our comfort, things that threaten to take away our joy, things that threaten to make us bored; and all of us, without exception, look to some refuge to protect us from those threats. It might be your spouse or your job or your home or your hobby or your TV or your mind or your library. It might be people or things or your own mind, or it might be God. If it is God – if you have learned how to flee from those threats and actually find real refuge and safety (not just theoretical, but real) refuge in God, that is a very important part of drawing near to God.

7. Fear God

Another aspect of the psalmist's drawing near to God is fearing God.

**⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,
⁹ Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.**

One of the most startling realizations that the Lord has shown me in His Word recently is the fact that, just as it is unfaithfulness to God when I offer my affections to the world instead of to Him, when I love the world instead of loving Him, it is also unfaithfulness if I fear anyone or anything else besides Him. The prospect of God's displeasure, the thought of Him being grieved over me or being angry with me or chastising me or turning His face from me or withdrawing His presence from me, those things should terrify me. That is not to say I should live in a state of constant anxiety, as though those things characterized God's disposition toward me. Those things do not characterize God's overall disposition toward any Christian. God is mostly pleased by Christians (and that goes for every Christian), however Scripture is clear that there are times of Him being displeased with us. And the more we love Him the more seriously we will take that. If the threat of losing close intimacy with Him is no big deal to me, then I have not drawn near to Him. If you are near to God in intimate fellowship, it is so wonderful and so satisfying that the threat of forfeiting that – even for an hour – is a horrible, scary thought. So fearing Him is a function of drawing near to Him. And fearing anyone or anything else is unfaithfulness.

Isa.8:12 do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it.³

Jer.10:5 Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good."

By fearing someone you are pointing to that person as the one who is in charge of harm or good. Which means you are putting that person in the place of God.

Isa.51:12 I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men

³ Peter quotes that verse in his discussion of persecution in 1Pe.3:14.

God says, “Who do you think you are? You have no right to fear men, because I am the one and only source of comfort. Your comfort or non comfort depends on Me, not them. How dare you fear men.”

Mt.10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

When you fear someone you are exalting that person to the position of being the one who is ultimately in charge of harm or non harm.

When you are afraid of disease, or sickness, or injury, or what your boss might do to you, or what might happen to your loved ones - all of that is unfaithfulness to God. Our attitude should be, “If God is about to use my boss to discipline me in His anger – that terrifies me. But if God is pleased with me and my boss’s actions are not being used by God as a rod of His discipline, then I am not one bit afraid, because as long as I have God’s favor I have everything I want.”

When we have that attitude we find ourselves not as people pleasers, trying to do whatever it takes to avoid human anger, but God pleasers, desperately seeking to be close to God and pleasing to Him so that there is nothing to fear. And that is a critically important way to draw near to God.

If you flee the displeasure of an angry earthly father, you might run out of the house to get away from him. But that doesn’t work with God, because He’s out there too. He is wherever you run. There is only one place to run to flee from God’s anger, and that is into God’s arms of love - to be reconciled to Him and draw near to Him in intimacy. The only refuge from God’s anger is God’s favor. The only place in the entire Universe where you can hide to be safe from God’s displeasure is in God’s arms of love. So fear of His displeasure is key component of drawing near to Him.

8. Seek God

¹⁰ The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.⁴

When your soul follows hard after God and clings to Him, that is drawing near to God. That is not accomplished by little sentence prayers throughout the day. Nor is it accomplished when your prayer life is a mere act of self-discipline apart from the affections, so that you pray because you make yourself pray and not out of a strong desire to be in God’s presence and to enjoy fellowship with Him.

Jer.29:13 You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

So ask yourself, “Is my seeking after God so intense that it uses up my strength?” “Is there any conceivable way I can look at what I am doing in my life right now and call that ‘seeking with all my heart’?”

9. Learn of God

¹¹ Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

The fear of the Lord is something that must be learned. We draw near to God when I read His Word not for the purpose of gaining a Bible education, or winning our next debate, or being able

⁴ You have a certain amount of strength, and you can spend that little bit of strength in one of two ways. You can be like a lion, using your strength to gather what you need and want, or you can use your strength to seek hard after God (which means you then have to trust Him to give you what you need and want.) Lions are very strong, but a lot of them starve to death.

to impress people, or taking pride in our great Bible knowledge; but when we study earnestly specifically with an eye to what will lead us to greater intimacy and fellowship with Jesus Christ. Some of you need to make a commitment to study the Bible more. But for others of you, that is not what you need. You already study the Bible – what you need is a commitment to change the way you study - to stop using the Bible as an encyclopedia or as a status symbol or a book of magic or a textbook or a mere reference book, and to use it as a means to intimacy.

Remember the three “I’s.” We are to use the Bible for Information that leads to Insight that leads to Intimacy. Some people stop at the first I. They are content to use the Bible for information. Their minds are filled with Bible facts, but they have not insight into the principles of how to live. Other people stop at the 2nd I. They use Bible information to arrive at insight, but then they are content just to know the principles. We haven’t used the Bible as we should until we gain information for the purpose of insight that leads to intimacy and fellowship – personal interaction with God.

You can’t have that intimacy without the insight. And you can’t have the insight without the information. So you do have to do the hard work of reading and studying and applying sound hermeneutics, and figuring out what the Greek words mean and reading the commentaries and all the rest. But all that is worthless if it’s done as an end in itself. You can’t bypass that work and go straight to intimacy, but nor should you be content with knowledge alone.

10. Seek reward from God

¹² Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. ¹⁴ Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. ¹⁵ The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; ¹⁶ the face of the LORD is against those who do evil

We draw near to God when we are motivated by the rewards He offers. When God offers something He says is wonderful as an incentive, and that has no pull on our hearts, that is a lack of faith. We either don’t believe His rewards are all that great (which is to doubt His goodness), or we don’t believe He will deliver (which is to doubt His faithfulness).

But when we see the life and good days that God promises as far better than any life and good days we might obtain any other way, that greatly glorifies God. And He will reward us for that by granting us nearness to His presence. (His face will be toward us instead of away from us.) Jesus commanded you to live your life for reward from God.

Mt.6:20 store up for yourselves treasures in heaven

Don’t just live a righteous life. Live a righteous life with the motive of seeking reward from God. That is an important part of drawing near to Him.

11. Repent

¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Do you want to draw near to God? Do you want God to be close to you? He is close to the brokenhearted and crushed. We draw near to God (and He draws near to us) when we allow trials and suffering to humble and crush us in repentance.

Ps.51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Isa.57:15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite

That is where God dwells – near the crushed, broken, contrite heart.

Jas.4:8-10 Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded people! ⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep. Your laughter must change to mourning and your joy to sorrow. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord

We draw near to God through repentance and contrition. And that is more than just being crushed and broken and sad. It also involves a turning from sin and a seeking of cleansing and righteousness from God.

So those are 11 aspects of the way the psalmist drew near to God in this amazing psalm that shaped so much of Peter's thought. And as we close let me just draw your attention back to 1 Peter two to show you the most important principle of all. Without this principle everything I've said is completely worthless.

1 Pe.2:4 As you come to Him ... ⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house^a for a holy priesthood^b to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God^c through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture: Look! I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and valuable cornerstone, and the one who believes in Him will never be put to shame! ⁷ So the honor is for you who believe

The most important principle of all is that all our drawing near to God is through Jesus Christ alone.

Heb.4:15-16 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near to the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us at the proper time.

We draw near to God when we boldly seek mercy and grace from Him in times of need, on the basis of our great, sympathetic High Priest alone. We don't rely on our performance or our godliness or our effort.

And if Jesus' righteousness is the basis of our seeking, then lacking boldness in our seeking is an insult to the sufficiency and merit of Christ. If I am timid about seeking grace from God it's because I am seeking it on the basis of my own merit. Because if I am seeking it on the basis of what Jesus deserves, the more bold I am the more that exalts the worthiness of Christ.

Heb.7:25 He is always able to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede for them. 26 For this is the kind of high priest we need: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.

All of our drawing near must be through Christ alone. We draw near to God when we seek His presence with a sincere heart, unwavering faith with a conscience made clear by Christ. Trust in Christ's work is crucial. You cannot draw near to God without faith – without complete trust in Jesus Christ alone.

Heb.11:6 without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and rewards those who seek Him.

Take advantage of the access to God that Christ purchased for you.

Heb.10:19-22 Therefore, brothers, since we have boldness to enter the sanctuary through the blood of Jesus...

21 and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.

You have access – use it! And if you do, God has promised that He will build Agape Bible Church into a spiritual house where people can come and actually experience the literal presence of the Most High God!