

An Open Church

by Richard E. Bieber

Richard E. Bieber's sermon emphasizes the importance of being an open church that fosters ministry both within the assembly and in the broader community.

Scripture: Acts 2:46

Topics: "Body Of Christ", "Everyday Ministry"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the frustration believers face in finding their place in serving God, emphasizing that ministry is not confined to church buildings but meant to be done in the everyday world. He highlights the importance of starting each week by ministering to the Lord together as a community, as seen in the example of Barnabas and Saul being set apart for their work after worshiping and fasting. Bieber stresses the need for believers to touch the Lord and each other through worship, daily prayers, and serving people in the world, illustrating the concept of the Body of Christ functioning as an open church where members support and uplift one another.

Transcript

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. Acts 13:1-3

Many believers seem to feel guilty and frustrated because they're convinced that they aren't doing enough "to help the church."

"I'm strapped down with my work schedule,"

"I live at a distance,"

"I just don't have the patience to work in the nurseries."

"I really don't feel bold enough to witness out on the streets."

"So, what is there for me? I come to church and try to participate in the worship. I pray for people.... and, once-in-awhile I get together with this one or that one. But is that all there is? I feel like I'm missing the

boat somewhere."

Much of this frustration arises from what appears to be a conflict in our approach to serving God.

On the one hand we know that every believer in Jesus is a minister, called to a life of radical commitment to Jesus and genuine service to others in his name.

On the other hand we can't seem to find the right place to fit in.

So we get ourselves all fired up that we have work to do....a harvest to bring in. But when it comes to finding the right work crew to join there doesn't seem to be any that fit our talents and gifts.

The first thing we need to get clear is that our ministry is not confined to the church building. In fact, most of what we do in service to the Lord is meant to be done out there in the everyday world.

God may have called you to gather with believers in the church building on Sunday morning, but that does not necessarily mean that he's calling you to visit the building three times more each week ... or to serve in some official capacity as a Sunday School teacher, a youth worker, a street evangelist, a singer or musician.

He may call you to these things, but he may be calling you to exercise the major part of your ministry in the place where you work.

Each of us has his own prayer closet. Each of us has her own sphere of travel and work. We have our own unique mix of friends, enemies, associates, bosses, clients ... that's where we minister!

"Well, if our ministry goes on out there, why do we have to take the trouble to come to church at all?"

Because the assembly of believers is the place where our ministry always begins. We start the week by first ministering to the Lord together.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Paul and Barnabas went out from there and those brothers and sisters in Antioch did not see them for a long time. But their ministry in Cyprus, Pamphylia and Pisidia was an extension of the church at Antioch where they'd been ministering to the Lord together.

Our ministry to the world beyond has to begin, as it did for Paul and Barnabas, with a ministry to the Lord in the assembly. Our ministry to the world in the name of the Lord will rarely have more life, power or joy than our ministry to the Lord in the gathered

fellowship.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46-47

....their corporate ministry to the Lord produced abundant fruit among men.

The fact that we go our different ways on Sunday afternoon and do not see most of our sisters and brothers for another week is normal, provided that when we do come together we truly minister to the Lord truly worship him and praise him. And provided we

minister the Lord's life wherever we are through the week.

When the Spirit gathers a body of believers into fellowship, he causes it to be open, as opposed to a tight-knit group where the members are so close to each other that an outsider has difficulty "getting in."

The best picture of what an open church looks like is our Lord's figure of the vine and the branches ... each branch has its own direct union with the Vine, yet the branches are in unity with each other through their common union with the Vine. And to turn the vision into a reality we have to touch the Lord and touch each other at three points:

1. If we are going to be an open church and not just a Sunday Morning Spiritual Supermarket we need to touch the Lord and each other in the assembly as we worship him.

We need to come to worship prepared, each bringing a heart that's been getting ready for the celebration all week.... daily offering our bodies as a living sacrifice. And now, together, we offer up praises to God ... the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Heaven opens and we enter with our High Priest, Jesus, into the presence of the Father.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

2. To be an open church we need to touch the Lord and each other daily in our prayers.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

We may not attend the temple together day by day but we do break bread in our homes daily ... and we can partake of our food with glad and generous hearts praising God.

If our daily life in our homes is to be lived with glad, generous, praising hearts there has to be a prayer life where, as our Lord did and the apostles after him, we take time to turn aside from everything else and come into the presence of God. And there, as our hearts

reach out and touch him, they also begin to reach out and touch each other we pray for each other.

How can any assembly of believers function as a body unless the believers care enough about each other to pray for each other. We sing, "We share our mutual woes; our mutual burdens bear....." How can this be, without daily praying for each other by name?

Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

Ephesians 6:18

For those of us who can, it's helpful to come together for a Bible study or prayer meeting in church, or in somebody's home, some time through the week. It's like an oasis in the desert a time for renewal. But Bible studies and prayer meetings are still no substitute for time

alone before God daily, interceding for each other.

3. To be an open church we need to touch God and each other as we serve people out there in the world.

We go "out there" under the anointing of the Spirit but we also go out there as members of one another.

For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged

the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many part, yet one body.

What a difference it makes in my dealings with people out there if I'm conscious that I'm dealing with them under the name of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit and if I'm aware that I'm not a lone ranger I have brothers and sisters who are upholding me in the Spirit even as I am upholding them where they labor.

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Across the earth the Spirit is manifesting the Body of Christ as an open church. He draws us together each week to minister to the Lord. Then he sends us forth as a Barnabas or Saul to the work to which he has called us.

May the Spirit increase our ministry to the Lord in our gatherings that we may go forth with power to get the job done.

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