

# Holy Proximity

by Richard E. Bieber

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of drawing near to God and others through humility, authenticity, and active engagement in relationships.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 57:15, Matthew 9:10, Luke 4:16, Luke 16:19, John 1:5

**Topics:** "Holy Living", "Christian Fellowship"

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## Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the importance of getting close to God and others, emphasizing the need to humble ourselves, remove our masks, and reach out to those in need. Through the story of the woman who touched Jesus' garment and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he highlights the significance of holy proximity and genuine connection in our relationship with God and fellow believers. Jesus, as the high and lofty One who dwells with the contrite and humble, exemplified closeness by physically being present with people, healing, freeing, and showing mercy. The sermon underscores the call to repentance, authentic fellowship within the body of Christ, and compassionate outreach to the marginalized as ways to draw near to God and experience His transformative power.

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## Transcript

For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits

Eternity, whose name is Holy:

"I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with

him who is of a contrite and humble spirit,

to revive the spirit of the humble,

and the revive the heart of the contrite."

Isaiah 57:15

Jesus is walking down the road surrounded by a pressing multitude. They know he's a healer. They know he's a prophet, but no one in that crowd really knows who this is . . . that this is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

A woman in the crowd who has been bleeding for twelve years . . . (she's spent all her money on doctors ... she's broken, contrite) says to herself,

"If I can but touch his garment I shall be healed."

She falls to her knees, reaches through the legs and feet and dust, touches the fringe of his garment and life from God rushes into her and she is healed.

For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity,

whose name is Holy:

"I dwell in the high and holy place,

and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit,

to revive the spirit of the humble,

and to revive the heart of the contrite."

God came near to her. . . she came near to God. In that holy proximity, that nearness, was life from God that restored this woman . . . changed this woman.

If we are to live in God,

walk with God,

do God's will,

fulfill God's purpose, we must find that proximity, that nearness to God and

live in it.

God has already come near to us. He comes near to us now. All we have to do is come near to him.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:16-21

Jesus did not

- preach good news to the poor over the radio,
- proclaim release to the captives over the T.V.,
- open the eyes of the blind with mail-order eye salve,

- deliver the oppressed by opening a liberation office in Jerusalem.

Jesus did nothing from a distance. He was with those poor in every way. He freed the captives by going into their prison and leading them out. He was there where they were . . . he got close.

- You could touch him.

- You could talk with him.

Jesus got close. He got close to his Father. Even Nicodemus could see that.

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God;

for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."

Jesus got close to his disciples . . . ate with them,

walked with them,

talked with them,

prayed with them.

Peter didn't have to battle his way through three secretaries to ask a question.

And Jesus got close to the people.

And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 9:10-13

Jesus wasn't just putting on an act to show that he was a regular guy. Those tax collectors would have spotted that in a minute. He was really there.

He was available.

He was reachable.

You could say that the power of heaven moved through the man, Jesus, Son of God though he was, because he got close.

- He stayed close to his Father.

- He stayed close to his disciples.

- He got close to the wounded ones in the world.

From the moment Jesus went down into the Jordan River at his baptism and joined himself to our sin, to his last breath on the cross when he died under the weight of that sin . . . died as the Lamb of God who

takes away the sin of the world . . . Jesus stayed close to us. He rose from the dead. Broke bread with his disciples. Breathed life on his disciples. . . still close. And when he returned to the Father as the first-born of the new creation, he kept his promise to stay close.

"Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

I will come to you.

I will dwell in you.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go.

I will guide you with my eye"

. . . Today he comes to us whenever we give him a chance. Our problem is that deep in our hearts we're afraid to get close to God or man. I don't mean "touchy feely" close, I mean close with the mind, close with the heart. Close enough to be rejected. Close enough to possibly get hurt.

"There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores."

Luke 16:19-21

The rich man could easily have given Lazarus some crumbs . . . he'd thought about it; but he knew that if he did this, this man who lay at his gate would get a little too close.

"Better keep my distance . . . walk by him . . . pretend I don't see."

- Isn't that the way we do it?

"The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' But, Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.'"

Luke 19:22-26

"It was your choice Mr. Christian not to get too close. Now you have it your way. Lazarus can't come and dip the tip of his finger. There is a great chasm, a great gulf fixed. . . (fixed by you) ...now you are far away from him forever. And this was your choice Mr. Christian this was your choice."

"And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent. '"

Luke 16:27-30

It's a good thing to be concerned about people in far away places who are the victims of injustice. . . send them help. . . demonstrate . . . get involved . . . and by all means pray. But the rich man in the parable did all that. He had just come from a tour of Afghanistan and the West Bank and was deeply moved. He considered himself an advocate of the oppressed. Advocacy was his thing. He was on three national committees.

But seeing Lazarus at his gate was another matter. That meant that you'd have to get close. And getting close has all kinds of dangers. What the rich man did not know was that advocacy without proximity is hypocrisy . . . if I don't get close my concern is a sham.

And what we need to see is that the door to the kingdom is holy proximity . . . getting close.

- You get close . . . you get in.

- You stay at a distance . . . you keep yourself out.

For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy.

"I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

God will get close to us. He will bring the very fire of heaven down into our hearts . . . heal our bodies, . . . restore our minds, . . . open our eyes, . . . loosen our tongues . . . if we will dare to get close to him in three ways.

1. By taking off our shoes.
2. By, taking off our masks.
3. By taking off our rubber gloves.

1. We need to get close to God by taking off our shoes . . .

"Moses, take off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

"Joshua, take off your shoes from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy."

. . . by humbling ourselves before him.

"I will revive the spirit of the humble . . . I will revive the heart of the contrite."

We can see the need for repentance in other people much more quickly than we see the need for repentance in ourselves. But there is no other way for us to draw near to God than to repent before him.

"Not my brother or my sister, O Lord, but it's me standing in the need of prayer."

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are. . ."

He thought that way all the time so he couldn't pray any other way. He remained separated by the gulf of his own arrogance.

The tax collector standing afar off would not even lift his eyes to heaven but beat his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner. . ."

He was standing afar off, but he got close because he took off his shoes. God help us to follow him today.

2. We need to get close to God by getting close to his Body on earth . . . his people . . .to do this we take off our masks.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

I John 1:5-7

And to walk in the light with each other is to take off our masks. We're not called to play church. We're called to draw near to each other and walk in the light with each other,' and have fellowship with each other so that Jesus can dwell among us . . . so that his Spirit can move with power in our midst. We can't have that until the masks come off and the walls come down.

3. We need to get close to God by getting close to those lost sheep out there. And to do this we have to take off our rubber gloves.

When you go to the dentist these days, he or she will be wearing rubber gloves. They don't want to take a chance on getting AIDS . . . we can't blame them. But when we walk around out there wearing rubber gloves so that we won't actually have to touch those lepers, those tax collectors, that Lazarus who sits at our gate full of sores, we dry up. The life of God dies out of us. Take off those rubber gloves and get to those lost sheep! ...talk with them! . . .listen to them!

Either we get close to Lazarus now while we have time or one day we'll be begging father Abraham to send Lazarus close to us to cool our tongue. And Father Abraham will say,

"See that great gulf? It can't be bridged. God didn't make it ... you made it ... you made it."

For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is

Holy:

"I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite

and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble,

and to revive the heart of the contrite."

God will get close to us. He will revive us, heal us, fill us with life,

if we get close to him.

Take off your shoes and worship him.

Take off your mask and draw near to our brother and sister.

Take off your rubber gloves and reach out to Lazarus and lift him up.

And you will find that as you do you will be touching the hem of Jesus' garment and his Spirit will come to you with power.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-e-bieber/holy-proximity/>

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