

# ***COMING TOGETHER WHERE IT COUNTS***



Every so often friends are shocked by the news that a husband and wife who were regarded by everyone as the ideal couple are throwing in the towel. Why should these two beautiful people who were always so devoted to each other be getting a divorce?

What none of the friends suspected was that this man and woman were having it rough for years. Countless times they sat down and talked about their problem and promised each other that they were going to do everything in their power to make it work. And they tried. They took a vacation in Florida, which they could ill afford. Later, they started entertaining friends a great deal. As finances improved they joined a ski club. They bought a boat. And always they seemed to be so in love, so devoted to each other. But when their friends went home and they were alone, there was nothing to talk about, they had nothing to share but their common hell.

So the resentment in each heart continued to build. The distance between them grew, until they were a universe apart while they lived in the same house and ate at the same table. You ask, how could this happen to two people who were once in love?

When they saw their marriage starting to totter, why didn't they try to save it? Did they not come together again and again in a genuine effort to be one? Yes, they came together on their trip to Florida. They came together in beautiful harmony when they had to put on the show of a successful marriage for their friends. They skied together and boated together. They tried terribly hard at making love, but they never came together where it counts.

They never came together at the meal table, for instance with their children, blessings from God, at their sides.

**No opening of the heart. No listening. No thoughtfulness.**

Or when the children were asleep and they were alone, they never learned to talk or to listen or even to share the silence of a peaceful room.

When a crisis hit the family, they never learned to stand and face it with arms around each other. Instead they let the crisis divide them, each blaming the other for the money problems, the loss of the job, the mess their child got into.

If a man and woman are going to make it in a marriage, they have to learn to come into unity with each other in the places that really count. Not up on the surface for their friends to see, but down deep. Not just with their bodies, but with their wills, their hearts. If they learn to have unity where it counts, the rest of the marriage will take care of itself.

### **Superficial Unity in the Body**

In exactly the same way brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ have a tendency to put a great effort into achieving superficial unity.

**We try to stage it, to engineer it.**

We know that unity is lacking both in our local assemblies and across the world. So, like the couple who think a Florida vacation is going to heal their marriage, we try naive cures. Coffee hours. More entertaining. Recreation. "Maybe if we get to know each other better....." To bring the city together we start holding meetings for all the leaders around town, working perhaps toward a city-wide campaign. "Maybe if we bring in a well-known evangelist and fill Convention Hall for two weeks, the church in our city will start coming together."

We can try all kinds of things to bring the Body into unity and in the end we find ourselves like that couple, farther apart than ever.

### **Coming Together Where it Counts**

**We have to learn to come together where it counts.**

There are three places where brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ need to come together, if we will draw near to each other in these three places, we will soon have heaven-sent unity in our assemblies and across our world.

#### **We need to come together before the throne of God.**

The first thing we're conscious of when we come into the presence of the living God is not ourselves, nor our differences, nor our similarities, but God himself.

We see our heavenly Father. We see his love. We see the Lamb seated at his right hand. We see the blood, the seven torches burning before the throne, glory.

Seeing these things, what can we do but worship? We lose ourselves in the worship of the true and living God. And as we praise him, the Spirit of God lifts us out of ourselves and brings us together in the mind of Christ.



When Mary, carrying the Christ in her body, and Elizabeth, carrying John the Baptist came together, they worshiped! When the disciples met the resurrected Lord on the appointed mountain, they worshiped! When they were released they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said,

***“Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who by the mouth of our father, David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit, ‘Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples imagine vain things?’”***

Worship was the normal atmosphere of the apostolic community. And surely if we want to come before the throne together, God will help us find our way. And the trivial things that have absorbed our minds will vanish as we stand in awe before glory that never fades.

### **We need to come together where the walls between us still stand.**

Why is that wall still standing? Can I honestly say that it’s all the fault of the man or woman on the other side of the wall? *“He put up the wall, man, and he’s going to have to take it down!”*

When is the last time I went to that wall and called the name of the person on the other side?

When is the last time I wrote that person a letter? Or held out my hand?

If I’m so sure that I am not the slightest bit at fault, what’s the harm in going to that wall and making some attempt at reconciliation? And if I know that I am wrong, why am I not admitting it and doing what I can to make it right?

God is not nearly so interested in declaring who’s right and who’s wrong as he is in seeing the wall come down.

### **The main thing is to get rid of the wall.**



This will never happen so long as we go on pretending that it isn’t there and carry on our lives as far from the wall as possible.

God help us to admit where the walls are. To repent before him, and go make it right in whatever way he shows us. A handshake. A word of concern. A letter. A plea for forgiveness. Sometimes it will take two or three “knock-down-and-drag-out” air-clearing conversations.

*“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.”*

**Every time we tear down a wall, the Spirit of God rushes in with life.**

Will anyone dispute that there is a wall between black and white believers? Are we relieved of the responsibility for that wall by hanging with our own kind as if it doesn't exist? Or the wall between the evangelicals and the non-evangelicals? Or the wall between the Catholic and Protestant followers of Jesus? Or the wall between Jew and Gentile, suburban and urban, young and old?

There will never be unity in the Body in this city until we come together at these walls and by God's grace, tear them down, painful and humiliating as this may be to us.

**We need to come together out in the harvest.**



Unity meetings with other believers in the Hilton may be pleasant, but in the long run they are about as useless as they are painless. When will we see the day when brothers and sisters from all sides start fishing together in the main shopping districts or on the waterfront, or on skid row?

How quickly our narrow minds will crack open to God's light when we all start combing the streets and lanes and highways and hedges together.

When sisters in a particular neighborhood start pitching in together to minister to women who need transportation to the hospital to visit a sick child, or a ride to the welfare office, or somebody to talk to when they're coming off a drunk, or some groceries to put in their empty refrigerator....

....more happens to bring healing to the Body than in a dozen meetings.

If we have to miss a few Bible studies to take care of these things, then we have to miss. If we spend all our time going to Bible studies and no time ministering to others there will be no life in us and no unity in the Body.

There is a place in the harvest for every single one of us. God will show us where it is, and when we get out there we will always find saints we never knew before. We will see God's hand at work in them too and we will have to praise him.

***When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."***

**And we can be sure that the laborers God sends.....will be one.**

They will not be competing.

They won't be at each other's throats.

Their very unity will be a sign to the world of the reality of our Christ.

*May God help us to come together where it counts, saved by the death of his Son, washed in the blood of the Lamb.*

*May we come together before God's throne and worship.*

*May we come together where the walls still stand and tear them down.*

*And may we stick like a brother to every disciple of Jesus we meet out there in the harvest, no matter where he comes from.*



*Message and prayer: Richard E. Bieber 1974 ... Sermon and excerpt from Church in the City*

*Featured Art: Courtesy of Gwen Meharg from her Draw near to God website/gallery [drawneartogod.com](http://drawneartogod.com)*

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