

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

I. Mandate to Prepare a Bride

1. One of the most important mandates for an eternal purpose church is to prepare an equally yoked bride for Christ who will partner with Him in great end-time authority and throughout eternity.
 - a. A major aspect of God's eternal purpose and an extremely important work of the Holy Spirit right now is to make ready a bride who will take on the nature of Christ in fullness so as to accurately represent Him in this age and throughout the ages to come. There is a heavenly mandate being issued to the church right now to prepare a bride for Christ.
 - b. Therefore, one of the primary objectives of the eternal purpose church must be to build into the lives of believers a radically different lifestyle than is currently being pursued by the vast majority of the church—a lifestyle that adequately reflects the life of Christ--so as to make a people ready as a worthy bride for Jesus.
 - c. There is an urgent need to lay down the existing wineskins that comprise the vast majority of the global church so as to make a people ready as a bride for Jesus, to be used in authority in the end times, and become Christ's eternal partner in His ever expanding kingdom.
 - d. Therefore, in this session, we will explore the need to create an environment in our churches for *the radical pursuit of becoming an equally yoked bride for Christ*. Let's begin this session by reviewing briefly God's eternal purpose as it relates to a bride for the eternal Son.

II. God's Eternal Purpose in the Bride

1. The prepared bride will become Christ's intimate eternal partner and represent the Father in fullness to the entirety of creation throughout eternity.
 - a. It was determined before the foundation of the world in the eternal council of the Godhead that the eternal purpose in the heart of the heavenly Father from eternity past is for all of creation to become mature sons for the Father and an eternal wife for the Son and for that family to dwell eternally in the new Jerusalem.
 - b. The scriptures teach that the Lord will have a worthy bride to present to Jesus at His second coming, stating that Jesus will present to Himself at His second coming a glorious church who is blameless and without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:27). It is an overcoming, prepared bride who God will use as a testimony to all of creation at the end of the church age. God will use the bride as the witness of who He truly is and as a realistic representative to a lost and corrupt culture to declare the manifold wisdom of God to every ruler, power, and principality. At Christ's return, He will give the prepared bride to Jesus as a wedding gift to be His eternal wife and reign with Him forever.
 - c. Following the Lord's return, the overcoming bride will dwell in great intimacy with the Godhead and be used in partnership with Christ throughout Christ's millennial reign as they together under His Lordship and in full union with Him subdue the earth unto full submission to Christ's Kingship. The bride will look on with great joy when at the end of the millennial reign of Christ with mission completed, the Son turns the earth over to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24).

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

- d. At the end of the thousand year reign of Christ, the wife of the Lamb will continue to partner with Christ from their intimate dwelling place of the new Jerusalem to take the gospel in an ever expanding and never ending way to the far reaches of creation.

2. The prepared bride will be used in great authority in the end times.

- a. One significant reason that the Holy Spirit is emphasizing the preparation of a bride in our day is because God desires to have a company of overcomers to be used in great authority in the end times. The Lord will use His prepared bride in unprecedented ways in the end times to partner with Him to enforce the victory of the cross upon the dragon and his demonic forces.
- b. Just like Esther after being prepared in the myrrh baths and after pleasing the king in the secret place was granted the golden scepter of authority to be used to defeat Haman and his 10 sons, the prepared, intimate bride of Christ will be used in similar ways to enforce Christ's victory won on the cross upon the dragon, the anti-christ and the enemy's demonic army. Just as the first bride, Eve, lost the kingdom to the serpent of old, the end-time bride in partnership with her Bridegroom will take it back.
- c. The overcoming prepared bride will become the man-child of Revelation 12 birthed out of the womb of the remnant church to be used to ultimately facilitate the casting of the dragon from the second heaven to the earth thus initiating the last 3 ½ years of the tribulation period. Through her intimate relationship with Christ, her overcoming character, and her eternal purpose intercession, proclamation, and ministry, she will be used in powerful ways in the end times.

3. Becoming the eternal wife of the Lamb is an eternal reward given to the betrothed bride who makes herself ready.

- a. The scriptures are clear that every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of his or her life. We know that God is a God of love and mercy but He is also a God of truth and justice. When we stand before Him as a true believer, we will either receive eternal rewards or not. These rewards are not trophies to make us feel good; rather, they are eternal rewards that determine our eternal intimacy and assignments that will affect us forever. As we state in several of our Lifeschool classes, the rewards granted to believers at the judgment seat can be placed in one of three general categories—eternal intimacy, eternal glory, and eternal authority.
- b. There is quite a discussion in the church as to whether being the wife of the Lamb is something that every believer inherits merely by being born again or whether becoming the eternal wife of the Lamb is an eternal reward granted only to those who have made themselves ready.
- c. We believe with scriptural evidence to support it that not every believer will be the eternal wife of the Lamb but instead this lofty position is a reward presented at the judgment seat of Christ to those who have fully made themselves ready. We believe that the bride is the part of the body of believers who will partner in the greatest measure with the Lord during the millennial kingdom to bring the earth under Christ's Lordship. We believe it will be the wife of the Lamb who will be used throughout eternity as Christ's intimate partner to take the gospel throughout the creation in ways yet unknown.
- d. Although every true believer will have access to the new Jerusalem, only the eternal wife of the Lamb will dwell there eternally. Many people are shocked by this statement and rightly so. Only overcomers

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

who take on the nature of Christ in fullness will become the eternal wife of the Lamb and dwell in the new Jerusalem forever.

- e. Therefore, it is imperative that the bride make herself ready.

III. The Bride Making Herself Ready

1. The Church age is the time when the bride is to be making herself ready.

- a. In the book of Revelation, John writing a passage that concludes the church age records what has become one of the most important verses about the bride making herself ready. He wrote,

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God" (Rev. 19:7-9).

- b. Based on the chronological positioning of this passage, the bride makes herself ready and then the Lord returns concluding the church age. It is very interesting the importance placed in the book of Revelation upon the bride making herself ready. Not only in this passage is there a call to get ready, but Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 repeatedly call the church to overcome and the promises to the overcomers include many granted to the prepared bride.
- c. When the bride is made ready in sufficient numbers, then the Lord will return. No matter how dark the world gets, the Lord will not return until a remnant of God's people will have made themselves ready as a bride by putting on their bridal garments.
- d. As we have thoroughly discussed in the Lifeschool class, *Understanding the Bride of Christ*, when a person is born again, he or she is betrothed to the Lord and is referred to as His bride. So in that sense, every believer is the bride of Christ. Once a believer is betrothed to Christ, they have the rest of their life to prepare their wedding garments, or in other words, to make themselves ready. Those who make themselves ready in fullness become the wife of the Lamb as referred to in Revelation 19:7.
- e. During this time period, believers are called to develop an intimate relationship with Christ and to die to sin and self so that Christ is allowed to become their life, fully possessing them in body, soul and spirit. The time between a person's betrothal and their either meeting the Lord through death or the second coming of the Lord is to be devoted to growing in love for Christ, in maturity, and taking on Christ's nature in fullness so as to come into full union with the Lord as His own possession.
- f. Therefore, a radical pursuit of Christ, much more so than most realize, is required to become the eternal wife of the Lamb.

2. To come into the full realization of this magnificent call, believers must first realize how important the bridal relationship is to God.

- a. Jesus spoke of the bride making herself ready. Immediately before going to the cross, He spoke about calling forth and preparing a bride. In some of His last words to His followers before going to the cross, Jesus shared a parable that highlights the importance of preparing a worthy bride for Him—the Parable of the Marriage Feast (Matt. 22:1-14). It reads,

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. Again he sent out other slaves saying, "Tell those who have been invited, 'Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.'" But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast." Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?" And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:1-14).

- b. As we read through this parable, we first see Jesus saying that the Kingdom of heaven is like a wedding that the Father gave for His Son. This in itself speaks of the importance of the bridal relationship believers are to have with Christ. Also, we note that this parable is spoken only a few days before Jesus went to the cross. At this point in His ministry He was speaking to His followers those things that He wanted to make sure they remembered and understood. He spoke to them about His second coming (Matt. 24), to be faithful to use what they had been given (Matt. 25:14-30) and about their bridal relationship with Him that the church is to have (Matt. 22; Matt. 25:1-3).
- c. If we add to Jesus' emphasis on preparing a bride with the truth that history begins with a wedding and the scriptures end with the prepared bride for Jesus descending from heaven to a new earth (Rev. 21-22), we quickly note that the topic of the bride and the call to prepare a bride is of utmost importance to the Lord.

3. In this parable which provides an overview of the marriage paradigm, there appear to be four categories of people.

- a. In the parable of the Marriage Feast, there are four categories of people. First, there are the slaves representing those in the body of Christ who are friends of the Bridegroom and out of love for Him want to gather a bride for Him.
- b. Second, there are the people who were invited but declined the invitation.
- c. Third, there are those who said "yes" to come and did put on proper clothing for the event. These were able to celebrate and enjoy the marriage feast.
- d. And, fourth, there was the one man called "friend" in the parable who said "yes" but did not put on wedding garments.

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

4. We glean from this parable that those who either do not accept the invitation to the marriage feast or who accept but do not put on wedding garments are excluded from becoming Christ's eternal wife.

- a. The parable closes with these words, "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen'" (Matt. 22:1-14). Although there is disagreement on the meaning of the idea of "outer darkness", we believe "outer darkness" refers to the heavenly outer court. In our Lifeschool class, *The Overcomers*, we address the meaning of outer darkness and conclude that outer darkness refers to the heavenly outer court or, in other words, the eternal abode of the foolish virgins. As stated in *The Overcomers*, in the Septuagint version of the Bible (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the same Greek phrase translated in Matthew 22 "outer darkness" is in 15 different instances translated "outer court".
- b. We should also note that the person improperly dressed at the wedding feast was referred to as "friend" suggesting some form of relationship with the slave. As we put this all together, we arrive at the idea that people who are truly born again but say "no" to the wedding feast are destined for heaven when they die but also destined for an eternity other than as Christ's bride.
- c. Equally true today is that there is a category of believers who have a relationship with Jesus but do not fully embrace the work of the Holy Spirit to make themselves ready so as to take on Christ's nature in fullness. These too run the risk of not becoming the eternal wife of the Lamb. As Luke 14:15-24 clarifies, there can be many reasons why people decline the invitation or don't prepare. Some pay no attention; others are too busy; still others put family issues ahead of getting ready. Regardless of the reason, the eternal relationship of those who don't make themselves ready will not be as the wife of the Lamb.

5. The bride will be made ready when she matures into full union with Christ.

- a. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that the one who has been joined to Christ through salvation and, in our bridal terminology is therefore betrothed to Christ as His bride, is one with Him in spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Even though the betrothed bride is one in spirit with God, that is in union with Christ in spirit at the moment of salvation, for the bride to be made ready this union must grow until through the process of sanctification the bride matures into full union with Christ in body and soul.
- b. Like Paul wrote in the book of Ephesians as he was describing the bridal relationship between Christ and the believer,

So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church [*the bride, italics mine*]. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband (Eph. 5:28-33).
- c. In the context of Ephesians 5, Paul explains that through the process of sanctification (Eph. 5:26) the union that took place in the spirit at salvation is to grow into full union in body and soul so that Christ

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

and His bride become as one—the two shall become one flesh—that is, into full union. When this occurs, the bride will have made herself ready.

6. One important ingredient of growing into full union with Christ is developing an intimate relationship with Him.

- a. Since the next session is totally devoted to the subject of intimacy with Christ, I will only mention it here in the context of it being an essential ingredient to growing in union with Christ and the bride being made ready. We see the idea of union and intimacy linked in several places in scripture; notably, in John 15 as Jesus speaks of abiding in Him and also in John 17 in Jesus high priestly prayer.
- b. In the bridal context, we see the idea of intimacy clearly in the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). In this parable, the oil that keeps the wise virgins' oil burning is their hidden life in God—that is, their intimate walk with Christ. As the parable notes, it is this component of their walk with the Lord that allows them to enter the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.
- c. Therefore, the pursuit of an intimate relationship with Christ is an essential ingredient to the bride making herself ready.

7. A second important ingredient for growing into full union with Christ as His bride is to be conformed into His image in fullness.

- a. We will also discuss this point in a later session; therefore, I will only make the brief point here that in speaking about the bride making herself ready, John wrote that the garments of the bride are “the righteous acts of the saints”. We observe the same idea in Ephesians 5 as Paul writes about sanctification being the pathway for the preparation of the glorious bride to be presented to her Bridegroom at His coming (Eph. 5:26-27).
- b. Therefore, we note another essential component of the bride making herself ready and that is being conformed into the righteous image of the Righteous One, Christ. As Paul wrote in many places, the bride makes herself ready by clothing herself with Christ. As believers die to the old man and come alive to the new they are progressively filled with Christ journeying toward the goal of fullness.

IV. Radical Pursuit of the Bridal Relationship

1. The betrothed bride must pursue making herself ready in a radical manner.

- a. The betrothed bride cannot remain lukewarm toward pursuing these three issues we have spoken of: 1) union with Christ, 2) intimacy with Christ, and 3) being conformed to the image of Christ. Every believer must radically pursue them. Over my thirty plus years of ministry, I have performed a lot of weddings. One thing I have learned is that every bride is focused. Their wedding day becomes the most important day of their life. There is nothing that can distract them from getting ready for that day. I would say most are radical in their pursuit of that day. Every believer must be like that bride getting ready.
- b. In a similar manner, the book of Hebrews makes the truth of radically pursuing the bridal relationship abundantly clear. Let's examine a few examples of saints of old to see how they pursued making themselves ready as a bride and the radical pursuit they lived by as they pursued the bridal relationship. To illustrate the radical pursuit of making ourselves ready as a bride, we will use the idea

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

of the pursuit of the bridal city, the New Jerusalem. The Apostle John wrote, “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready *as a bride* adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). In recording this truth, John connected the new Jerusalem to the bride. Thus, as we observe saints of old pursuing the eternal city, we see that they are also pursuing becoming the eternal wife of the Lamb. Just as these faithful witnesses pursued their bridal relationship with the Lord, in a similar manner each of us need to develop the same faith and same attitude in the people we lead.

2. Abraham left everything to pursue the bridal city.

- a. When God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 12 to leave his homeland and come to a strange land, Abraham obeyed and went to what eventually became the Promised Land. However, his act of obedience involved much more than the search for a piece of land in the Middle East. He was on a journey to the eternal city, the new Jerusalem.
- b. At some point in his journey whether at the beginning of his call or as he went, God gave him a vision of much more than a piece of property. God revealed to Abraham the city of which the architect and builder was God. Read this passage from the book of Hebrews,

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; *for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:8-10).*

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- c. The vision of the bridal city is what drove Abraham for the rest of his life to lay down every earthly possession and purpose so as to pursue his inheritance—the eternal city of God. When you read the story of Abraham, you see that he went through trial after trial. He made mistakes and sinned along the way. But he never gave up and never turned back. If it had been only a piece of land he was looking for, he might not have thought it worth the laying down of his life. But he had received a glimpse of the bridal city—the new Jerusalem. Because God had revealed it to him, he was determined with all that was in him to reach this goal, and he pursued it with radical abandonment.

3. A great cloud of faithful witnesses have also pursued the bridal city in spite of trials, tribulation, persecution, and hardship.

- a. Hebrews 11 and 12 speaks of a great cloud of faithful witnesses who like Abraham went on their own personal journey toward the bridal city. Note these verses,

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, *they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.* Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; *for He has prepared a city for them (Heb. 11:13-16).*

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; *for he was looking to the reward (Heb. 11:24-26).*

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

- b. Hebrews 12 reveals to us the reward that Moses and the other witnesses were pursuing. It reads,

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them...But you have come to Mount Zion and to *the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:18-24).

- c. All of the great cloud of witnesses, whether they knew it or not, were on a journey to the bridal city, and they pursued it with a radical abandonment throughout their life. They laid down their worldly possessions, their desires for this life, their ambitions, and their life in general to allow Christ to fully have control of their life so as to receive the reward of their inheritance—the eternal city of the new Jerusalem. They lived a life as follows,

...who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, *so that they might obtain a better resurrection*; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground (Heb. 11:33-38).

- d. They lived this way to receive *a better resurrection*, the resurrection as Christ's bride, and to experience the ultimate reward—to inherit the bridal city, the new Jerusalem.

4. God is calling His eternal purpose church to pursue the bridal relationship with Christ with the same radical fervor as did Abraham, Moses, and the great cloud of witnesses.

- a. Rick Joyner wrote an allegorical book about the journey to the eternal city titled *The Path*. In the book, He compares the majority of the church to people on a cruise ship who devote their life to cruising up and down the coast with no real purpose or destination to their journey. In his book, he contrasts those on the ship with a few who wake up to the reality of the eternal city and leave the comfort of the cruise ship to go on a path through the wilderness toward the city.ⁱ

- b. Just like in the book, there is a real temptation for all of us to stay on the path we are currently on—on the cruise ship of our life. It is easy to cruise in our relationship with the Lord without really pressing in to Him in deeper ways and into a more surrendered life. However, the church is in the valley of decision right now. Will we remain on our own personal cruise ship or will we depart the comfort that our existing lifestyle provides for a journey into a lifestyle of preparation that will ultimately lead to the eternal city on the hill—the new Jerusalem.

- c. Here is what the author of Hebrews wrote concerning the need to pursue the bridal city,

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

- d. Let us all choose to radically pursue our bridal relationship and the eternal dwelling place of the wife of the Lamb, the eternal city.
5. Believers must develop a lifestyle in which they *radically* pursue making themselves ready as a bride.
- a. How believers prepare *now* determines their eternal destiny. Believers must be prepared now for the judgment seat of Christ. Every believer will have their life judged by the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ. At that time, it will be determined if we will be the eternal wife of the Lamb. It will be determined and sealed forever at that time what level of eternal rewards—eternal glory, eternal intimacy, and eternal authority—we receive. It will be determined at that time if we will be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, if we will be the eternal wife of the Lamb, part of the man-child company, how we will be used in the millennial kingdom, and our eternal role for the ages to come. It will be determined if we will be used forever as the eternal wife of the Lamb to partner with Jesus to spread the gospel to the vastness of creation.
 - b. We have only our life to make ourselves ready for the most important appointment we will ever have. Therefore, it is urgent that we radically pursue making ourselves ready for Jesus—whether it is His second coming or our coming to Him at the conclusion of our life.
 - c. As we looked at the faithful witnesses, we got a pretty good idea of the attitude necessary to become a member of the bridal company. They were a radical group, and we too must become radical in our pursuit of the city not made with hands. To be prepared for the Lord, believers must come out of cultural Christianity and doctrines of demons to radically pursue Christ. There are at least five themes that must be included in the radical pursuit of the bridal relationship that believers must incorporate into their lives.
 - 1) Believers must take up a bridal identity realizing that they are a betrothed bride for Jesus and that their life on earth is the only time they have to make themselves ready for the coming of their Bridegroom King.
 - 2) Believers must pursue as part of their bridal identity a deeply intimate and personal relationship with Jesus—far deeper and far more intimate than most are currently pursuing.
 - 3) Believers must progressively surrender their life to the Lordship of Christ so that Christ possesses them in greater and greater measure. Believers must grow in full union with Christ so that their self-life decreases and His life more and more becomes their life. In other words, their life must be hidden in His life so that they grow into full union with the Godhead in actions, thoughts, and choices.
 - 4) Believers must also pursue taking on the nature of Christ in fullness. Believers must embrace the cross life so as to become like Christ in fullness. This will be the primary way believers are judged at the judgment seat of Christ. Did we learn to love? Did we become intimate with the Lord? Did we take on the nature of Christ in character? Did we obey the written word of God and follow His voice fully?

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

- 5) Finally, believers must be prepared to partner with the Lord in authority in this life. As believers overcome, they will be positioned to be used in authority in this life as His priestly bride in action. It will only be a measure of the authority to be granted in the ages to come. But it will be most definitely an aspect of our maturing to be the overcoming warrior bride/son that God desires of His end-time church.
- d. So every believer must make these pursuits that lead to being made ready as a bride a real priority in their life.

V. An Environment for Bridal Preparation

1. Currently, the vast majority of church leadership is not giving sufficient attention to preparing a bride for Jesus.
 - a. A long held burden of mine is that much of the church, and many of our Lifeschool graduates included, do not realize how important it is *that the bride must make herself ready for the second coming of the Lord. It is crucial for God's end-time purposes and for the believers' eternal destiny that the church be made ready as a prepared bride.*
 - b. The Lifeschool class, *Understanding the Bride of Christ*, clearly communicates this truth. Even though it is communicated precisely, pastors who have studied it themselves and taught it to their congregations are not sufficiently transforming the lifestyle of their church members so that they are radically pursuing all that is taught in this class. Our intent in writing this class was and still is to *transform lifestyles* and to incorporate these truths into the lives of believers so that they develop a true bridal identity and devote their lives to making themselves ready as a worthy bride for Jesus and ready for His second coming.
 - c. In 2016, in a gathering in Kenya of about 40 regional Lifeschool leaders, the Lord visited us with His great burden for a worthy bride to be prepared for Him in Africa. I had never experienced anything like it. On the second day of our meetings, the Holy Spirit overwhelmed me with His burden for the African church in general and for our Lifeschool leaders more specifically. I began to weep uncontrollably for quite a number of minutes. No one including me knew what to do, but after a while the Lord spoke His burden through me. I found myself saying, totally unplanned, "If your motive for being in Lifeschool is anything other than preparing a bride for Jesus, then don't come back tomorrow." I am pleased to report that all of the leaders returned the next day; however, this encounter impacted me mightily. It revealed to me and everyone in the room the great burden of the Lord in our day to have a prepared bride for Jesus. In fact, two years later as I write this manual, I sense that this class and the Eternal Purpose Initiative that we are beginning is God's answer to His cry from heaven that day. Whereas Lifeschool without realizing it has in the past been inviting people in Africa to the marriage feast, now we are to be about the task of not only inviting them but helping them cloth themselves with bridal garments.
 - d. The Lifeschool pastors are not the only group of pastors and leaders who do not understand the heart of the Lord to prepare a bride for Jesus in our day. This lack of understanding and lack of burden is a prevalent attitude around the world. Therefore, it is imperative that one of the primary objectives of the eternal purpose church become to create an environment in which people can be motivated, made to understand, make themselves ready, and given a platform to participate as the bride of Christ.

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

2. Leaders must create an environment in which the bride can be prepared.

- a. It is incumbent upon the leaders of an eternal purpose church to radically pursue ourselves being prepared as a bride and also to lead the people we pastor into this reality as well. We are all aware of the following passage in Ephesians,

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, *for the equipping of the saints* for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ* (Eph. 4:11-13).

- b. Fivefold leaders must be committed to the mandates of this passage, and for our purposes here, to equip the saints until they reach maturity, and maturity defined as coming into a stature which belongs to the fullness of Christlikeness. This is the primary function of leaders, and it is the primary mandate of those who want to build an eternal purpose church.
- c. Leaders must transition from chief ministers to chief equippers. In our role as a chief equipper, we must be committed to creating an environment and preparing the people we lead to come into the stature of becoming like Christ and all that this involves. Therefore, leaders must equip those who they lead to radically pursue their bridal relationship and all that is involved in this pursuit.

3. The Parable of the Marriage Feast contains three mandates to church leaders—go, invite, and disciple.

- a. In a sense, this parable parallels Jesus' great commission recorded in Matthew 28. In the great commission, Jesus tells His followers to do three things: 1) go, 2) invite people to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, and 3) disciple them into all He taught. It is interesting that the Parable of the Marriage Feast contains these same three mandates although slightly modified. First, He once again tells His followers to go (Matt. 22:3-4; 22:9-10). He sent them to two categories of people—those who had already been invited to the marriage feast and to those who had not yet been invited. So, we see in the parable the call to go and to invite but this time not only to salvation but to the marriage feast. In the parable, rather than telling His followers to call people into the kingdom through salvation, He tells them to go and invite them to the wedding feast. In essence, this call communicates to leadership a call to invite both the lost and the saved to become the wife of the Lamb. Even the truly born again believer must say “yes” to be made ready as a bride for Jesus.
- b. The third mandate of the parable is to call on those who said “yes” to the invitation to put on wedding clothes. Rather than to become a disciple as described in the great commission, in this parable the Lord calls those who accept the invitation to the marriage feast to put on wedding garments in preparation for that event. In other words, He is calling them to be made ready for marriage to the Lamb.
- c. Therefore, we see the same three actions as in the great commission—go, invite, and disciple. However, here the Lord is saying to His church to not only invite people into salvation but to also invite them to become the eternal wife of the Lamb *and to create an environment so that those who accept the invitation can make themselves ready as a bride* by putting on wedding clothes which are the righteous acts of the saints (Rev. 19:7-8).

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

- d. The entire parable presents a frightening scenario for us all. No believer desires to spend eternity in a lesser relationship than the wife of the Lamb. Therefore, for pastors, leaders, and believers alike there is a mandate to treat this parable much like the great commission of Matthew 28. In our day the Lord is offering another great commission and that is, in addition to inviting people to salvation and discipling them in the foundational principles of the gospel, the eternal purpose church is also called to invite people to the marriage feast as the bride of Christ and *to create an environment in which they can make themselves ready as the eternal wife of the Lamb.*

4. Leaders must teach and train the people they lead the truths that will awaken them to being made ready as a bride for Jesus.

- a. Leaders must teach on topics that will lead people to be made ready as a bride. They must teach on developing a bridal identity. They must teach on the man-child which is to emerge from the womb of the church. They must teach on becoming an overcomer. They must teach on the judgment seat of Christ and the journey to the eternal city.
- b. It will not be sufficient though to just teach a class on a Wednesday night as a Bible study when half of the church is not there. It will not even be sufficient to teach through a series of Sunday morning messages, even though that should be done.
- c. From our experience, mindsets change slowly and therefore, we must teach on these topics regularly and repeatedly in different ways and on multiple occasions. For example, we must avoid teaching a twelve session class on the bride and then never mentioning it again. We must keep these themes that comprise the journey to the eternal city ever before the people. So we must repeatedly teach on these themes. Most definitely we do it in different ways focusing on a variety of aspects of these themes. But we must teach and teach and teach so that people wake up and begin to pursue becoming what we are teaching.

5. These themes must also permeate every topic we teach.

- a. Most definitely, there are other things in which we will need to teach and equip our people. Just as the passage in Ephesians we just noted states, fivefold leaders are to equip the saints also for the work of service, unity of the faith, and knowledge of the Son of God. So, there are many other topics to be taught. Even so, as a leader of an eternal purpose church the radical pursuit of Christlikeness and the radical pursuit of the bridal relationship must permeate our ministry in all we do and teach.
- b. I know for us at our home church, these issues are imbedded into the thought processes of our leaders, into our conversations with the people, our messages regardless of the topic of the specific message, in our prayer ministries, and in our training too. These themes must repeatedly be voiced to the people just like we would talk about a theme like salvation or healing. We don't do a salvation or a healing message every week, but we bring up these themes in the midst of other teachings so that people know about healing and salvation. We must do likewise with our bridal pursuit.

6. For this type of emphasis to permeate our ministries, it begins with us realizing we too are on a journey to become a bride for Christ.

- a. In recent years, I have become more and more aware and I have spoken with several other leaders who have also become more aware that we will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ ourselves to give an account for our own life. I am not talking here about preparing others to stand

Session 6: Facilitating a Bridal Identity

before the judgment seat, but about ME standing before Christ to give an account of my life. This pervasive thought has really brought a much deeper, but healthy fear of God into my life and has made me much more focused on radically pursuing being made ready as a wife for Christ and to dwell eternally in the eternal city.

- b. As I have done this, I know the idea of radically pursuing being the eternal wife of the Lamb has become intertwined with all I teach and preach. Regardless of the message, this idea comes up regularly in my teaching. The reason I mention this is that each leader of an eternal purpose church must come to grips with these ideas for themselves, and when we do and begin to radically pursue a bridal relationship ourselves, then the message of the pursuit of the bridal relationship will permeate our life message and the specific messages we speak to those we lead.
- c. This is a critical dimension of preparing our people as a bride for Jesus. As our people see the fire in our own personal pursuit of a bridal relationship with Christ, they too will pick up a similar fiery determination to pursue the same goal.
- d. So, let's do it. Let's pursue with radical abandonment being made ready as a wife for Christ and to dwell forever in the new Jerusalem, the city prepared for Christ's bride. Also, let's create the environment for this pursuit to emerge, and let's lead our eternal purpose church to do likewise.

ⁱ Rick Joyner, *The Path*, (Fort Mill, SC: Morningstar Publications, 2013), pp. 33-45.