

Session 7: An Environment for Intimacy

I. An Intimate Bride for the Eternal Son

1. In this session, we will continue our discussion of creating a spiritual environment for the bride to be made ready.

- a. The primary theme of the last session was that since one major aspect of God's eternal purpose is to have an equally yoked bride who is fully prepared and in full union with the eternal Son, the eternal purpose church must create an environment for believers to take on a bridal identity which includes an environment for the bride to be made ready.
- b. In the last session, we addressed several passages related to the bride with our primary focus being on Jesus' parable of the Marriage Feast recorded in Matthew 22. In essence, we made the points that the bride who desires to be made ready radically pursue being made ready as an equally yoked bride for Christ.
- c. In the last session we called on church leadership and individual believers to create a spiritual environment for their church to develop a bridal identity in which believers are encouraged to radically pursue three primary virtues—full union with Christ, intimacy with Him, and to be conformed into His image. As I think about these three virtues, I conclude that full union is in reality the result of the fulfillment of the other two virtues—intimacy and image. Therefore, in this session we will emphasize intimacy with Christ. One more point. When we get to the part of this session in which we discuss the Song of Songs, we could use the same text to chronicle our journey toward union or image just as easily as intimacy. Even so, we use the book in this session to highlight the journey toward an intimate relationship with Christ.
- d. With that introduction, let's get started.

2. The Father has invited His family to dwell intimately with the triune Godhead.

- a. John wrote about the relationship between the Father and the Son, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God *who is in the bosom of the Father*, He has explained Him" (Jn. 1:18). The word translated *bosom* in this verse carries several shades of meaning. It suggests a state of blessedness, a place of honor¹, and, for our purposes, a relationship of intimacy and oneness. Thayer's Greek Lexicon records these words about the meaning of the Greek word for bosom as used in John 1:18, "the closest and most intimate relation to the Father".² In eternity past, the Father and Son dwelt together in full union in great spiritual intimacy. The intimacy that the Godhead experienced from eternity past, still experiences today, and will forever experience is indescribable with our natural minds. The good news for us is that God has invited all of His creation to abide in this intimate relationship with Him.
- b. In fact, Jesus in His high priestly prayer prayed these words, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (Jn. 17:20-21). In some manner of great intimacy beyond our comprehension, the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father—and we are invited into this relationship. We might not understand it, but as a part of God's eternal purpose, we are invited into a close, intimate union with the Lord and for this to last forever.
- c. However, in order to experience this level of eternal intimacy as the wife of the Lamb, the betrothed bride must develop an intimate relationship with the Lord *now*.

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3. The parable of the ten virgins speaks of the need for the bride who desires to be ready to develop an intimate relationship with the Lord.

- a. Once again Jesus focuses His followers on the need for the bride to make herself ready. In the last week of His life before going to the cross, Jesus shared yet another parable with His disciples, this time the parable of the ten virgins. It reads,

Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. But at midnight there was a shout, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him." Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the prudent, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out." But the prudent answered, "No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves." And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, "Lord, lord, open up for us." But he answered, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you." Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour (Matt. 25:1-13).

- b. A book Bryan and I wrote a few years ago, *A Worthy Bride*, has an entire chapter on the Parable of the Ten Virgins in which we develop the support for all ten virgins being Christians. We will not attempt to present again our support for this truth. Therefore, with the assertion that all ten virgins are Christians, the book makes several points about intimacy with Christ as an essential aspect of making ourselves ready for our Bridegroom and for receiving permission to participate in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Even though we won't try to repeat everything from this chapter of the book, the following summarizes a few statements from the book.
- c. In the parable, the lamp symbolizes the virgins' external life in God, shining forth the light of their relationship with Jesus. As Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16).
- d. Therefore, the wise virgins' light was their godly character which had been conformed into the image of Christ. The light was the fire of their passion for Jesus and the brilliance of their ministry, service, and good works. It was the power of God working through them because they were fully yielded to the Holy Spirit and had paid the price for Christ to conform them to Himself. In summary, their light represented the external fruit of their personal walk with the Lord.
- e. The lamps described in this parable were actually torches that were fed by a small vessel containing oil. These vessels held a small amount of oil and had to be frequently replenished.³ Without the constant supply of oil, the light would quickly go out. The oil that fueled these lamps was also hidden by the vessel that contained it. Applying this information to the parable, the wise virgins' light shined brightly because it was empowered by their secret life in God. Just as oil was hidden in flasks, their lamps burned brightly because of their hidden relationship with the Bridegroom. This oil of intimacy could only be purchased by each virgin individually, and it could only be purchased in the secret place of a relationship with Jesus (Matt. 25:9; Rev. 3:18).
- f. As we see, five virgins were wise and five were foolish. The Greek word for foolish is *moros*, which basically means being dull or sluggish.⁴ The foolish virgins were not evil; they were good people who

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were dull and sluggish in their walk with the Lord. Because they took their position as the bride of Christ for granted, they grew lukewarm. The foolish virgins lived by human reason, logic, and self-will (1 Cor. 2:12-16). Though they were born again, they were entangled in the busyness of life and were weighed down by the cares of the world. Because they did not make intimacy with Jesus their priority, Jesus spoke these sobering words to them: “Truly I say to you, I do not know you” (Matt. 25:12). Jesus was not saying He did not know who they were, for He is omniscient. He was saying that He did not know them intimately.

- g. Throughout the Bible, the word “know” often suggests knowing someone fully or intimately. In fact, the Hebrew word for “know” is sometimes used to describe physical intimacy between a husband and wife (Gen. 4:1, NKJV). The Greek word used for “know” in this parable is *oida*, which means “fullness of knowledge.” This type of knowledge is fully developed, as opposed to knowledge that is still growing.⁵ Therefore, Jesus was telling the foolish virgins that He did not know them in the fullness of a close, intimate relationship.
 - h. The wise virgins, on the other hand, lived differently. They paid the price to purchase the oil that kept their lights burning brightly (Matt. 25:13). They went to the secret place on a regular basis to meet with their bridegroom, they did the other things that led to an intimate relationship with the Lord, and as a result, developed an intimate relationship with Jesus. When the bridegroom returned, the wise virgins had sufficient oil, their lamps burned brightly, and Jesus knew them intimately. Because the wise virgins took their personal relationship with God seriously, they were ready for the bridegroom’s coming and were welcomed at the wedding feast (Matt. 25:10).
 - i. Finally, as Jesus so clearly tells us in this parable, we cannot borrow oil from anyone else—we have to purchase it ourselves. Just like we can’t depend on another’s faith for our salvation, we can’t depend on anyone else for an intimate relationship with Christ’s. We must go to the dealers ourselves (Matt. 25:9), and we must go often to keep our oil supplies replenished. Purchasing oil will cost us time, money, and even friends. Yet the small price that we pay cannot even compare to the rewards we will experience at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The wise virgins knew the expensive cost of oil, but they considered being eternally prepared for Jesus worth any price.
4. According to this parable, those who do not develop a secret place relationship of intimacy with Jesus in this life will be excluded from being the eternal wife of the Lamb.
- a. It is worth repeating a few verses from this parable. Jesus said the following, “And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you'” (Matt. 25:10-12).
 - b. When Bryan and I wrote *The Worthy Bride*, my third son Jonathan was preparing to get married. There were a lot of parallels that took place in the planning of their wedding and the bride making herself ready. God gave us this wonderful picture to illustrate our marriage to the eternal Son. One thing that happened occurred at the wedding event itself. Jon and Heather decided to get married on a Friday night in Atlanta, the town in which we live. As everyone who lives here knows, the traffic on a Friday evening is horrific. Some of the invited guests did not plan well and did not allow sufficient time to get to the wedding hall. As a result, they were late. It did not escape many of us how powerful a picture the Lord gave us of the bride making herself ready. For those who were late, the door was shut and they could not get in. The ushers eventually opened the back door and they were allowed to

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enter; however, the point was made. Those who do not prepare and are not ready will experience a shut door that no man can open.

- c. Therefore, we learn some crucial truths necessary for our making ourselves ready as a bride for Jesus, and that is, we must not only take on the image of Christ in fullness, we must also become intimate in relationship with Him. *The bride who makes herself ready will be like Him in image and close to Him in intimacy.*
 - d. Although I most certainly don't feel like I have arrived yet at the intimate relationship with Christ that I desire, as I have pursued an intimate relationship with the Lord and have helped lead others into a similar relationship, I have discovered several truths. First, it is not easy. It's much easier to go to church, attend a conference, serve in a ministry, or even to take part in a corporate fast than to regularly set time apart to seek God personally and to pay the price of making Christ the love and Lord of our lives. Despite our good intentions, the cares of the world, busyness of life, opposition of the enemy, careers, children, recreation, and so many other "good" things distract us from the secret place.
 - e. However, the scriptures are clear. Those who wish to become the eternal wife of the Lamb must develop an intimate relationship with the Lord. As stated in many of our Lifeschool classes, one of the major eternal rewards offered to the believer is eternal intimacy with the Godhead. What wonderful promises to the overcomer to be a pillar in the house of God, receive a ticket to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and sit with Christ on His throne. We are invited to eternal intimacy with the Lord, but to experience it we must pursue it in this life. Even though we will be allowed in heaven if we truly confess Jesus as Lord and believe in our heart in Christ in true faith. However, we will only experience intimacy eternally to the degree that we pursue with a radical abandonment intimacy with Him now. With the degree of importance that God puts on intimacy with Him, it is imperative that those who desire to be the eternal wife of the Lamb also place a high degree of importance on intimacy and pursue it regardless of the cost.
5. Leaders who desire to build an eternal purpose church must create a spiritual environment for people to develop their own intimate relationship with Christ.
- a. It is of utmost importance that as those called to build an eternal purpose church regularly and repeatedly emphasize to those we lead the need to develop an intimate relationship with the Lord and to create a spiritual environment in our churches for this to occur. *Those leading an eternal purpose church must create an environment that facilitates people developing an intimate relationship with the Lord. For most of us, facilitating such an environment will require major changes in our teaching/preaching and major changes in our church program.*
 - b. Now that we have laid the foundation, let's look at some specifics.

II. Positioning for Intimacy

1. Intimacy is the result of a life drawn progressively into full union with the Godhead so that Christ permeates every aspect of one's life.
 - a. In this section, we will highlight eight lifestyle pursuits that when really pursued regularly as a lifestyle over a lifetime will lead to an intimate relationship with the Lord. *One thing we must clarify before digging into details is that developing an intimate relationship with the Lord involves much, much more*

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than having a daily devotional or quiet time. Whereas time in God's presence is part of pursuing God, an intimate relationship involves every aspect of our life.

- b. Intimacy with Christ involves our secret life in God, one that ministers unto the Lord and that honors God even when no one is looking. It requires all of our life to be intertwined with the life of God to the point that we become one with God in body, soul, and spirit. Intimacy does not come from just checking off a list thinking that if I have a quiet time, I will be intimate with the Lord. Rather, it is a lifestyle in total devotion to the Lord that will manifest Christ progressively possessing us as He increasingly becomes our life. As Colossians 3:1-5 states, intimacy is the result of our keeping on "seeking the things above where Christ is" to the point that our life is hidden within the life of Christ so that He becomes our life and we grow toward total union with the Godhead.
- c. Although in the following paragraphs I will refer to a variety of scriptures, I will draw extensively from King Solomon's Song of Songs. The book is a love story between King Solomon and a maiden describing how their love grew over time in intensity and maturity. This book also depicts a wonderful allegory of a maturing and increasingly intimate relationship between an individual believer and Christ as Bridegroom King. The book includes a number of valuable principles that shed light on developing an intimate relationship with the Lord. Now with that foundation, let's list and briefly discuss eight aspects of developing an intimate relationship with the Lord.

2. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must first desire it with all of our heart.

- a. These words are recorded toward the beginning of the Song of Songs, "For your love is better than wine...Draw me after you and let us run together!" (Song. 1:2-4). Speaking allegorically at the beginning of the Song and at the beginning of the bride's journey toward intimacy with her Bridegroom, the believer comes to the realization that a loving, progressively more intimate relationship with Christ is better than anything the wine or stated differently, the pleasures of the world, can offer. At this point in the Song, the believer has not yet become intimate with her Bridegroom, but she has awakened to a real and deep desire in her heart for an intimate relationship with the one she loves. Therefore, she expresses her desire for a more intimate relationship with Him by asking Him to draw her after Him and let them run together in intimacy and maturity.
- b. Words from the Psalms convey so effectively the heart that wholeheartedly desires an intimate relationship with the Lord, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps. 42:1-2); "How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord" (Ps. 84:1-2); "How blessed are those who dwell in Your house!" (Ps. 84:4); and "For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside" (Ps. 84:10). This is the type of desire that will help us begin the journey toward intimacy and will keep us on the journey when weariness, opposition, spiritual dryness or busyness confront us.
- c. Desire is a very real key to developing an intimate relationship with the Lord. I did a quick internet search on desire. Among others, these phrases appeared. "If it is important enough to you, you will find a way. If it is not, you will find an excuse." "Nobody is too busy. It is just a matter of priorities." "You have the time to do what you want." You get the point. With obviously some limits, we will do what we desire to do. This is a major key to developing an intimate relationship with Christ.
- d. There are three words I have used in the past in teaching about the need to become a student of the scriptures. The words are discipline, delight, and desire. These ideas not only apply to the study of the

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scriptures. They can just as easily apply to intimacy. The point is that desire for intimacy is not necessarily present at first. When I first got saved, intimacy with the Lord was very far from my heart. I just did not want to go to hell. Later, my walk was more focused on the blessings of the Lord than the Lord Himself. But throughout these periods of transition, I began to study the scriptures. At first, I disciplined myself to do this, but as I did, I began to desire to study the Bible. It was not long that I could not live without my time in the Word of God. The same is true with intimacy. When we awaken to the idea that we are to be intimate with the Lord, at first we may not really desire it. We might begin with a simple knowing that we are supposed to have a close relationship with the Lord. However, if we will just discipline ourselves to pursue Him, desire will emerge and it will remain with us forever. This has been my experience. When this is the case, we must discipline ourselves to do the things that lead to intimacy even if there is not desire accompanying it. When we do so, we will eventually delight in our intimate relationship and, in fact, cannot live without it. When intimacy becomes a delight, a desire will be birthed that cannot be quenched. For me, desire for intimacy was not there at first. But now I cannot live without nurturing my relationship with the Lord. I desire Him. I desire to hear His voice, to know His word, to encounter Him in fullness. Just as it was with me, it will be so with you. Thus, desire is a key to intimacy.

3. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must also have a revelation of the love of God for us.

- a. Again, we go to the Song of Songs. One of the maiden's first statements about herself was that she was black but lovely (Song 1:5). At this point in her walk, she knew intellectually that she was lovely to the Lord. Even so, the blackness of her heart was ever before her. She saw her sin and the imperfections in her heart more than she knew the love of God for her. This couldn't be allowed to remain this way because if it did, then she would forever remain distant from the Lord she loved. Her sin, shame, unworthiness and rejection would forever keep her distant. Therefore, for much of the remainder of the chapter in the Song, the Bridegroom told her how lovely she was. Finally, she realized that her Bridegroom loved her as she says, "He has brought me to his banquet hall, and his banner over me is love" (Song 2:4). He has raised the banner of love over her and now she knows that she is loved. She can now continue to grow in intimacy knowing that not only does she desire God, He also desires an intimate relationship with her.

- b. This is the way it is with us too. One session we teach in our Lifeschool class, *The Worshiping Church*, is titled *Confidence to Enter the Holy Place*. The session revolves around this passage in Hebrews,

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Heb. 10:19-22).

- c. Every believer must have confidence that through the blood of Jesus, we are cleansed from all the defilement that we have encountered in life. Some issues have arisen from our sin. Others from things done to us. Regardless, the blood of Jesus has cleansed us so that we can pursue an intimate relationship with the Lord, that is, so that we can press on beyond the veil into a deep, intimate union with the Lord. However, even though this is the truth of the scriptures, many, many believers have erected an invisible veil that hinders them from drawing close to the Lord. Over our years of ministry in our local church and in the nations in which we have ministered with Lifeschool, we have seen this take place over and over again. People who don't have a revelation of the love of God toward them are hindered from intimacy with Him. Therefore, one of the first steps toward developing an intimate

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relationship with the Lord is getting a real and deep revelation that God loves us even in our weaknesses, sin, and spiritual frailties. Now, He does not want to leave us controlled by sin, self, shame or rejection but He loves us just the same.

- d. If believers do not overcome the feeling that because of the blackness of their life, God does not want them close to Him, they will forever stay distant. Much like the prodigal son when he came back to the Father wanted a job in the field. Instead, the Father made him a son in the house. For most, it will require a revelation granted by the Holy Spirit to know the love of God.
- e. You will note in the Song that the bride was not able to move forward in her journey toward intimacy until He had raised His banner of love over her (Song. 2:4). The same will be with us. We must know that the three Persons of the Godhead love us deeply even in our imperfections and that we are welcome in the presence of the Lord. There is much more to intimacy than this but this is a beginning step in the journey. That is why prayers like the one in Ephesians 3 are so important to gain a revelation of the length, width, depth, and height of the love of God that surpasses all comprehension (Eph. 3:18-20).

4. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must be devoted to being in God's presence.

- a. Once again we go to the Song of Songs for our text. The maiden in her journey is drawn early in her journey toward intimacy with her Bridegroom King into the secret place to encounter the pleasures of God. Immediately after asking her Bridegroom to draw her after Him, these words are noted "The king has brought me into his chambers" (Song 1:4). Shortly after, these words are recorded,

In his shade I took great delight and sat down, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He has brought me to his banquet hall, and his banner over me is love. Sustain me with raisin cakes, refresh me with apples, because I am lovesick. Let his left hand be under my head and his right hand embrace me (Song 2:3-6).

- b. As you will quickly notice, the Bridegroom brought the maiden into His chambers. There He fed her with raisin cakes, refreshed her with apples embraced her with His love and sheltered her in the shade of His presence. It was here that she learned of the love, care, nurture, and provision of the one she desired. It was here that she fell so in love with her Bridegroom so that she could not live without Him. She was lovesick and was ruined forever from anything other than Him and the joy of His presence. The same is true with us too. It is in His presence that we fall in love with our Bridegroom King and cannot live without a close, intimate relationship with Him.
- c. Therefore, a crucial component of developing intimacy with the Lord is spending time in His presence and, in addition, staying connected to His presence twenty-four/seven. The scriptures use words like seek (Ps. 27:4), study (2 Tim. 2:15), wait (Ps. 130:5), dine (Rev. 3:20), meditate (Josh. 1:8), fellowship (1 Cor. 1:9), and abide (Jn. 15:4-5) to describe our call into His presence. There is not sufficient time to develop each of these; however, they are essentially self-explanatory.
- d. If we are to develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we absolutely must develop a secret place relationship with Him in His presence. This is most definitely not all there is to an intimate friendship with God. As we stated earlier in the session, intimacy is much more than having a good quiet time with the Lord. Even though it is not all that is involved, without a connection to God 24/7 that includes time in His presence on a regular basis, we will not grow in intimacy with the Lord.

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- e. Each person is different so I will not attempt to make a formula out of our time with God other than to say that our time should include all of the above in some form or fashion. We must include in our secret place relationship with the Lord times of study of the scriptures and reading and meditating on His Word. We must include times of waiting on the Lord to hear His voice and to encounter Him. We must have opportunities of dining with Him in prolonged times of fellowship with Him with no agenda or prayer need, only to be with Him. We must also remain connected to the Lord day and night. We must fellowship with Him and abide with Him connected as a branch is to a vine.
- f. In writing these things, I am not attempting to put anyone under condemnation. We all have different obligations and are at different seasons in life with a variety of time availability. Even so, everyone who desires an intimate relationship with God must make a way to develop and grow in a secret place relationship with the Lord in His presence. Without it, we will only be able to go so far toward intimacy. Therefore, I can't emphasize enough how important this aspect of intimacy is. Without it, it will be difficult to hear God or to discover His will or direction.

5. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must be devoted to complete obedience to God, His Word, and His voice.

- a. When we think of intimacy we normally think of time in His presence, worship, and things like this. Whereas these are critical components of an intimate relationship, intimacy is also a by-product of being obedient to the Lord so as to follow Him wherever He goes. The believer who longs for intimacy with the Lord must desire and strive for full obedience to the Lord. To support our premise, we once again draw from the Song of Songs.
- b. After the banner of love had been raised over the betrothed bride, her Bridegroom called her to come along with Him on a journey, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along" (Song 2:10). In response to His invitation, she responds, "Turn, my beloved, and *be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of Bethel*" (Song 2:17). In this verse, *Bethel* means separation.⁶ The Bridegroom is asking the maiden to follow Him but she refuses. Telling Him to turn away and separate, she refuses to obey Him. It is very interesting that immediately after she tells him to go His own way, the Bridegroom does separate from her and withdraws His presence from her. That wonderful feeling of the secret place was with her no longer. There is much more that we could say, but the point for us here is that her disobedience caused Him to separate from that intimate relationship she had previously had with Him.
- c. In contrast to her disobedience, we observe in the book of Revelation a company of people who have walked in full obedience to the Lord,

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads...*These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.* These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb (Rev. 14:1-4).

- d. This passage refers to a people who will be close to the Lord in an intimate relationship with Him for all of eternity. In describing this group, the Apostle John wrote that "these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes". In other words, they were fully obedient.
- e. We see another passage connecting obedience to intimacy in the Gospel of John. Jesus told His disciples, "You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends..." (Jn. 15:14-15). Jesus changed the way He referred to His closest disciples by no longer referring to them as slaves but as

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friends. Why? Because they did what He commanded them to do. In other words, His followers were obedient and that affected their intimacy.

- f. Another crucial concept to understand is that we will not be fully obedient without a secret place relationship with the Lord. There is a degree of obedience that we can attain from the written word. The scriptures tell us clearly to forgive when offended, to give, to love others, etc. There is a significant measure of obedience that comes from the simple reading and studying the scriptures or hearing the Word preached in a worship service. In addition to obedience to the written word, there is another aspect of obedience that is crucial. It is obedience that comes from hearing and obeying God's voice spoken directly to us. To be fully obedient, we must be obedient to the natural reading of the scriptures, the revelation of the written word that is revealed personally as a word to the believer and from His voice that is spoken to us.
 - g. I will explain what I mean with a personal testimony. The story relates to the Lord speaking to me to have more children. I have shared this story a number of times, but I share it again because it makes the point I want to make. The Lord spoke to me that my wife and I were to trust God to let Him decide how many children we were to have. After making this decision to obey, we subsequently had two more children who are now adults. I want to make three points about this decision. First, this call of God to obey Him in this way did not come from the written word; instead, it came directly from His voice spoken only to me. Second, it came out of time in God's presence. If I had not slowed down long enough to wait on God to speak in my secret place time with Him, I quite possibly would not have ever heard His invitation to have more children, and I would have missed the opportunity to be obedient. Third, I have no actual data to support this but I have believed for many years that making this decision had a great impact on my intimacy with the Lord. I am most definitely not saying I have arrived in an intimate relationship with the Lord, but I do know that I am much closer to Him because I followed His voice—not just something written in the scriptures—but His personal voice to me.
 - h. To be obedient in this way requires a secret place relationship with the Lord in which we position ourselves to receive instruction from the Lord so that we can be obedient positioning ourselves for greater intimacy with the Lord. Of course, conversely not obeying whether through disobedience or not positioning ourselves to hear His voice leads to our not drawing closer to the Lord in intimacy. To be fully obedient, we must be obedient to the natural reading of the scriptures, the revelation of the written word that is revealed personally as a word to the believer and from His voice that is spoken directly to us.
6. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must surrender regularly and repeatedly to the Lordship of Christ.
- a. Continuing with our approach of drawing principles from the Song of Songs, we note this verse, "Until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away, I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense" (Song 4:6). If you will remember, the betrothed bride earlier had used the same phrase—"until the cool of the day when the shadows flee away"—to tell her Bridegroom to go His own way and leave her where she was. In other words, to separate because she was not going to surrender her will to follow Him in obedience. Now, two chapters later she can't live without the intimacy she once felt with her Bridegroom, and she uses the same phrase to say "I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh". What did she mean by this declaration of her willingness to follow Him? Myrrh was a spice that had a bitter taste but a sweet aroma. It was used as an ointment to prepare people for burial. Here it signifies death to self-will. In other words, because the maiden desired

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intimacy with her Bridegroom with great passion and could not live without Him, she was willing to embrace the cross in order to have Him and in so doing lay down her self-life in order to gain it.

- b. It is certainly no accident that immediately following her decision to take up her cross and follow her Bridegroom King, that the Bridegroom states about her that she is “altogether beautiful” and that there is “no blemish in you” (Song. 4:7). He also for the first time refers to her as His bride (Song. 4:8). The point is clear. The Lord makes a connection between surrender to Christ as Lord by denying self, taking up our cross daily, and following Him (Luke 9:23) and a progressively more intimate relationship with Christ.
 - c. We all love what Christ did for us on the cross for it was through His death, burial, and resurrection that we are offered salvation, healing, and deliverance and, in fact, every blessing of life. However, there is also another aspect of the cross and that is the embrace of the cross life which leads us to die to sin and self. It is through this dimension of the cross life that we are positioned for a progressively more intimate relationship with the Lord.
 - d. As we walk with the Lord throughout our life and even on a daily basis, we are faced with choices, trials, and issues that arise. In each case, God’s desire is for us to choose Him, His way, His will, and His word. In reality, it is choosing His life above the life our soul would choose. To live this way requires us to surrender to the Lordship of Christ. Some of the decisions we are faced with are major life altering decisions that affect our career, family, income, and even health. Over my years of walking with the Lord, I have been faced on several occasions with major decisions. I shared a little earlier about the invitation to have more children and to trust Him as Lord in that entire area for the rest of my life. After obeying in that area, we had two more children, but we could have had more. We didn’t know how many we would have. That was a major call to us to surrender to His Lordship. On another occasion, we were faced with walking away from a very lucrative business. It all worked out very nicely, but we did not know that at the time. It was a major call to surrender to the Lordship of Christ and trust Him for financial support as I pursued Him in fulltime ministry. Those are two examples of major areas of surrender that I had to make. Everyone who goes deeper in God will face their own decisions to make and in each case, we must surrender to His Lordship when these major life changing issues arise.
 - e. These major life altering decisions for major transitions do not occur every day; even so, God places other things not so monumental before us virtually daily. These take the form of trials and tribulations, interaction with other people, the call to overcome some area of sin or self, and choices to walk in integrity. Some of these things are in the sight of others whereas some occur when no one else knows. In each case, we are called on to deny our self and our own desires and to choose God’s way. As we make these choices of surrender to be obedient to God’s word and voice over the course of our life, we grow in intimacy with Him.
 - f. Thus, another dimension of growing in intimacy is to take up our cross daily and follow Him.
7. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must pursue revelation knowledge of the Person of Christ and the eternal destiny of the prepared bride.
- a. To draw our next principle, let’s go back a chapter in the Song of Songs. The bride has told her Bridegroom to separate from her because obedience was too difficult. He honored her request and withdrew His presence (Song. 3:1). As we just noted, in Chapter 4, she made the decision to surrender to His Lordship and to follow Him in obedience on the journey He had planned for her. The question for this section is “What made the difference?” “What caused her to change?”

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- b. Chapter 3 of the Song gives us the answer. Two primary *revelations* come to the bride that she had not previously known. The first is that she received a deeper revelation of her Bridegroom King. She had a level of revelation about Him in the beginning of the book, but here she gets a deeper revelation in the majesty of His kingly attire (Song. 3:6-10). She sees Him perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, scented with powders and riding on a traveling couch surrounded by sixty mighty men accompanying Him. For the first time, she gets a personal revelation of who this Man really is. For the first time, she has a revelation of this man as a mighty King adorned in great splendor and accompanied by a great entourage. She receives a greater revelation of the true knowledge of who He really is.
 - c. Second, she gets a revelation of her personal destiny as His bride. She gets revelation for the first time that He is coming for her to take her with Him on his traveling couch to the wedding He is planning for them (Song. 3:11). For the first time, she has seen what her Bridegroom King intends for them, and, that is, to be married. She receives another personal revelation that her destiny and the reason she is being led through these difficult times of testing is to prepare her to be His eternal wife.
 - d. So back to our questions of what made the difference and what caused her to change. It is a greater revelation of the Person of her Bridegroom King and a greater revelation of her eternal destiny as the prepared bride. These two revelations awaken her to the need to surrender to His Lordship. She now realizes who He truly is and why He is asking her to lay down her life in fullness.
 - e. Therefore, another principle for growing in intimacy is to gain a progressively greater and greater revelation of Christ and His eternal destiny for His bride. Revelation of these things puts in the heart of the bride such a passion for Christ and a hunger for her destiny to be fulfilled in Him that she is willing to pay any price to have Him in fullness. As she does so, she is progressively drawn closer to her King.
 - f. We must understand that a deep revelation of the Person of Christ cannot be understood by natural means. We can get a measure of insight into Christ and His destiny by reading the scriptures; however, the type of revelation that draws us to abandon our self life in order to follow Him fully only comes by revelation knowledge. The primary action that we can take to get this type of revelation is to desire it and out of desire ask for it on a regular basis. Just like Paul wrote in the book of Ephesians, we must pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation of the Person of Christ (Eph. 1:17) and to pray that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened to know the hope of Christ's calling, that is, our destiny in the context of God's eternal purpose (Eph. 1:18). If we ask for revelation like this and accompany it with a study of the scriptures and time in His presence, God will meet us at the point of our desire and grant us a deeper revelation—and the result will be greater intimacy with the One we love.
8. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must pursue a lifestyle of purity.
- a. Toward the end of the Song of Songs, the Bridegroom declares that the bride who has been making herself ready has a purity upon her that has set her apart from the other maidens. The verse reads, "Who is this that grows like the dawn, as beautiful as the full moon, as *pure* as the sun, as awesome as an army with banners?" (Song 6:10). This verse appears in the context of the Bridegroom saying about her that she is His perfect one and that she has arisen above the sixty queens, eighty concubines, and maidens without number (Song. 6:8). He calls her "the pure child of the one who bore her" (Song 6:9). If one reads the entire chapter, it becomes clear that the Bridegroom is madly in love with His betrothed bride and welcomes her into a spiritually intimate relationship with Him.

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- b. Therefore, from this chapter of the Song, we observe another principle for positioning ourselves for an intimate relationship with the Lord—a life characterized by purity. The apostle John exhorts us to develop purity in our lives writing, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:2-3). In this passage, John is saying that to position ourselves for meeting Christ face to face, that is, the ultimate encounter of intimacy, we must devote ourselves to purifying ourselves for that encounter. Jesus makes a similar point in the Sermon on the Mount saying, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:8). Both of these scriptures connect in some manner intimacy with Christ to purity in our own lives.
- c. The connection makes perfect sense. Just think of yourself having a friendship with someone who is living a life of defilement in any number of ways. Depending on the degree of defilement, this would be repulsive and would cause us to put up walls in any relationship that might exist. We would not desire to be close to them. The same is true with the Lord. He loves us even in our defilement. Out of His great love, He saves us and justifies us treating us as if we had never sinned in a judicial sense, and we can come boldly before His throne of grace to receive help even in our sin. However, in terms of relationship and intimacy, He develops a more intimate relationship with those who are on a journey toward purity. Just like in the Song, our purity of heart, body, mind, will, and emotions causes Him to think of us in this way, “You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my darling, as lovely as Jerusalem, as awesome as an army with banners. Turn your eyes away from me, for they have confused me” (Song 6:4-5a). The Bridegroom is touched and moved by the bride’s pursuit of purity in her heart.
- d. Purity comes from several dimensions of our relationship with the Lord. Purity is the result of sanctification of body, soul, and spirit. Sanctification is the process of being made holy or to use the terminology that we are using here, the process of becoming pure. Sanctification includes the separation from all things that hinder being holy as Christ is holy. Sanctification is the result of a person overcoming the world, the flesh, and the devil.
- e. Over our years of ministry, we have found that often going free from demonization is the first step in a life of increasing purity. Paul wrote the following about purity, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). Notice that he includes cleansing ourselves from all defilement of spirit. In our deliverance class, *Preparing a Bride through Deliverance*, I wrote that *our journey to become like Christ includes a pursuit of purity, and purity includes, but obviously is not limited to the purification of our body, soul and spirit that comes through deliverance. Demonization will not only keep us in bondage, it also imprisons us in impurity.*⁷
- f. Of course, deliverance is not the end all in developing purity. It is only the beginning. Just like the walled city of Jericho was only the first city the Israelites had to bring down in taking their inheritance, deliverance is only a step in the process. Overcoming one’s flesh--sin and self--is another aspect of purity. Just like the verse we just quoted, we must also cleanse ourselves not only from all defilement of spirit but also all defilement of flesh too. This involves dying to self and sin, overcoming self and sin struggles, and gaining victory over the temptations that the enemy places in our lives.
- g. Finally, we must also separate from the lure of the sinful and distracting lure of the world. We are to be in the world but not of the world. In our day, the crafty serpent places many worldly things before us just as Paul wrote to “lead us astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). Some of these worldly things are sinful, but many are not sinful in and of themselves. Rather they distract us from our relationship with Christ. To summarize, purity—that is, a of a lifestyle of

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overcoming the world, our flesh, and the devil—is a key component of an intimate relationship with Christ and an attribute to be wholeheartedly pursued.

9. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must allow Christ to possess us in body, soul and spirit so that He becomes our life.

- a. The following three verses in the Song make a very powerful statement about the Bridegroom progressively possessing the bride until He becomes her life more than anything the world could offer,
 - My beloved is mine, and I am his (Song 2:16).
 - I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine (Song 6:3).
 - I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me (Song 7:10).
- b. You will notice that as the book progresses and accordingly her journey toward intimacy progresses throughout the Song, she declares herself to be more and more His. In the early portion of the book, she declares more than anything else that the Bridegroom is hers. She does acknowledge that she is her Bridegroom's but the primary focus of her relationship is on her. She makes it clear that at the beginning of her walk toward maturing in her intimate relationship with the Lord, she is focused on what she gets out of the relationship. She loves Him but she is in it for what she gets out of the relationship. She is enjoying the abundant life He offers her. She loves His presence in the secret place and she enjoys His work on the cross and what it provided for her. At this point in her walk, she thinks her relationship with her Bridegroom is all about her, saying "He is mine".
- c. Four chapters later after embracing the cross in order to have Him, she has matured in her designation of their relationship. Now it is much more one of mutual benefit as she states that "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine". With this statement, she acknowledges that He does possess her (I am my beloved's), but He has not yet become her life in fullness as she adds that "my beloved is mine". In other words, she has not yet fully died to her self-life to the point that as Paul wrote her life was hidden with Christ in God so that Christ was completely her life (Col. 3:3-4).
- d. Finally she arrives at the place where she can say with confidence, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me". In maturity, she realizes and speaks accordingly that the Bridegroom possesses her fully and that there is nothing of her left. He possesses her to the point that she has fully died to her self-interests so that He is now her life.
- e. This must become the ultimate goal of the bride who desires the deepest level of intimacy with the Bridegroom. The bride longing for an intimate relationship with the Lord must allow Him to crucify her flesh, set her free from all defilement and separate her from the lure of the world to the point that He possesses her in body, soul, and spirit and has become her life in every respect. She has finally reached that point in which her life is fully hidden in Christ.
- f. When she has reached this point in her relationship, there is a deep and profound level of intimate union between the bride and her betrothed Bridegroom. The Song records it like this,

Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it (Song 8:6-7a).
- g. There is now a fiery passion in her heart for her Bridegroom and a similar passion in His heart for her. Her journey is now complete as she is now passionately in love with her beloved and intimate with

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Him. He is her all in all and the joy of her life. All of her other lovers have fallen by the wayside and she lives only for Him. She is now in full union with her Bridegroom and is now the intimate bride ready for the wedding feast.

III. Creating an Environment for Intimacy

1. Believers and leaders alike must create a spiritual environment in their lives and churches that facilitate spiritual intimacy.
 - a. Whether you are an individual looking for an intimate relationship with the Lord or a leader in the Body of Christ leading believers into an intimate relationship with the Lord, for this amazing journey to become real in a person's life, we must create an environment for it to happen. Just like with every aspect of spiritual environment discussed in this manual, these things will not just happen without us being intentional and putting effort and energy into it. Believers must wholeheartedly pursue these eight principles for intimacy, and leaders likewise must pursue them in their own life *plus* leaders must also create an environment in their churches for intimacy to occur.
2. In addition to pursuing an intimate relationship themselves, leaders must also structure their church services and programs to facilitate intimacy.
 - a. For this to be accomplished, it will require us to preach and teach on intimacy, create an environment for intimate worship, change our church program so that people are not worn out doing church activities, lay down activities that do not facilitate an eternal purpose church and replace them with activities that do facilitate God's eternal purpose including an intimate relationship with the Lord.
 - b. Although there are many things that can foster an environment in our churches for greater spiritual intimacy I will mention just a few. There is not time to develop each point, but for the most part they are self-explanatory.

Pursue our own intimate relationship with the Person of Christ.

- c. We can only lead people to the place in which we are going ourselves. Thus, the first step in creating a spiritual environment for intimacy is to pursue it ourselves by radically pursuing the eight principles I mentioned previously in this session.

Teach on spiritual intimacy and regularly refer to the idea when teaching on other topics.

- d. People pursue and become what we as leaders emphasize. If we want to develop a people who are pursuing intimacy with Christ, we must emphasize intimacy in our teaching and preaching. Certainly a series now and then on intimacy is essential. In addition, even when we teach on other topics, referring to intimacy with Christ will make the people we lead aware of the importance of this principle.

Create a spiritual environment in your church services for intimate Christ focused worship.

- e. The current worship movement is much more of a music movement than a worship one. For the most part, it is outer court praise at best and in many cases not even that. One important shift most of us will have to make is in the way we do corporate worship. To facilitate intimacy, we should create an environment for deep, personal, and intimate worship in our corporate services. We must structure worship that is Christ focused, and led by people who have a progressively intimate relationship with the Lord themselves.

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Teach people to hear God's voice.

- f. One topic to be emphasized to a people desiring intimacy is hearing or encountering God in visions, dreams or other means. It is sad how few believers really know how to hear God. Learning to recognize God speaking to them most definitely facilitates two-way communication and fellowship and greatly enhances their intimate relationship with God.

Teach people that God loves them and that there is no condemnation in Christ.

- g. One of our eight points was a revelation of God's love for us even in our weakness and sin. This is a very important topic to continually emphasize in our worship services. People who do not have a revelation of this vital truth are consistently bombarded by the enemy with condemnation. They need to have confidence to enter the holy place. Thus, we must regularly emphasize this basic yet essential truth.

Avoid all unnecessary church activities

- h. Some of the places we have traveled to in our mission activities fill each week with church activities. Whereas some of these are good, in many cases they wear out the saints and keep them from a joyful, intimate relationship with the Lord. Certainly there is a balance; however, we must evaluate our weekly program of activities and only do those things that facilitate an eternal purpose church and in the context of this session fosters intimacy.

Establish Eternal Purpose Prayer Groups

- i. Prayer not only accomplishes God's kingdom purposes, it also enhances intimacy with the Lord. We will speak about eternal purpose prayer in Session 10, but for now know that facilitating this type of prayer is one church activity that is very much needed and one that positions a person for intimacy with Christ.
- j. The above is only a partial list of things we can do to facilitate intimacy with Christ as leaders. You will be able to think of others. Although all of this is a challenge to u, it is possible. So, let's go for it. Let us all create a spiritual environment for the people we lead to grow in intimacy with Christ.

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² *Bosom*, Thayer's Greek Lexicon, PC Study Bible formatted Electronic Database. Copyright © 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

³ *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. "lamp", referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).

⁴ *Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. "fool, foolish, foolishly, foolishness", referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).

⁵ *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. "know, knowledge, known, unknown", referenced from *PC Study Bible v3.2* (Seattle, WA: Biblesoft, 2001).

⁶ *Bether*, Strong Old Testament 1335, Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Unabridged, Electronic Database. Copyright © 2002, 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved

⁷ www.lifeschoollibrary.org, *Preparing a Bride Through Deliverance*, Notes, Session 1, p. 6.