

Session 2 Understanding the Message of the Bride of Christ

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

In this session we're going to give a very brief overview on understanding the message of the Bride of Christ. People ask me all the time, "What exactly is the message? What are the key points?" I thought in this session I would put it all together—not that I don't miss a few points, but these are the main ones.

THE BRIDEGROOM MESSAGE IS JESUS' HEART

Paragraph A. The essence of the Bridegroom message is the Bride of Christ message, because the Bridegroom message is who Jesus is. The Bride of Christ message is who we are. We're only who we are because of who He is. It's really the same message, so I use those terms interchangeably. The essence of the Bridegroom message is the revelation of Jesus' emotions for us. That's a big subject. It's the revelation of His emotions for us and the revelation of His commitments to us, particularly what He has committed to share with us that is His. The message extends to our wholehearted response to Him. That's what the message of the Bridegroom and the Bride of Christ is: the revelation of His emotions for us and the revelation of His commitments to us, particularly the measure of what He's going to share with us. The level to which this is going is our wholehearted response back to Him in love and in doing His will.

LOVE WITHOUT REGARD FOR COST OR RECOGNITION

The verse I want to mention here, because we're going to spend a whole session on this, is Song of Solomon 8:7. It says that if a man gave all his wealth for love, it would be utterly despised. What this means in context is that if someone is so moved by love for God that he would give everything because of it, he would utterly despise any recognition that he did something heroic or noble. He would say, "No, I don't want any recognition; I don't even want anyone to know. It doesn't matter to me, because the anointing to love is the reward I'm after." It's an approach to love that disregards what it costs, and that disregards all recognition.

TO LOVE WHOLEHEARTEDLY IS THE REWARD

The ability to love is the reward of a lover. The ability to love wholeheartedly is the reward of one who truly loves. That's what Song of Solomon 8:6–7 is saying. No price is too great. That's the wholehearted response we're talking about. In one sentence, the bridal paradigm, the bridal message, is about wholeheartedness. You can use the word *wholeheartedness*, which I use regularly, or you can use the word *abandonment*, where we give all. Jesus gave all and we give all. Jesus is wholehearted in His love; we are wholehearted in our love. The bridal message is about wholeheartedness. The reason I say that is that some people think of the bridal message as being mostly about His tenderness. His tenderness is a critical part of the bridal message, but at the very core of it, it's that He gave all and we give all. That's what the message of the Bride of Christ is about. It's the beckoning of our heart to give all in light of what He gave.

Paragraph B. Around here we use the term "bridal paradigm" a lot. You'll hear different teachers in our school use that term. All it means is a perspective. A paradigm is a perspective; it's a point of view. In this context, it's a bridal perspective of the kingdom, because we can see the kingdom through many different lenses. When we see it through the eyes of a Bride who is wholehearted and loyal in love, when we see the kingdom through the eyes of one who sees a Bridegroom who deeply loves us, then we view the kingdom differently. The work of the kingdom, the nature of the kingdom, and our identity itself is changed when we look at the kingdom through the eyes of a bride.

Paragraph C. Jesus was the first One to introduce the bridal paradigm to the Church in the New Testament.

THE KINGDOM VIEW THAT TRANSFORMS OUR HEART

Paragraph D. There are different paradigms of the kingdom of God in the Bible. They're all valid. There are different ways to look at the kingdom. The kingdom of God is compared to agriculture in many analogies: The kingdom of God is a field, a farm or a vineyard. There are military paradigms and economic paradigms. There are different ways the Bible says to view the kingdom. We gain different truths and perspectives from each. They're all valid and important for getting a holistic view of the kingdom. But the view of the kingdom that most transforms our heart is the bridal paradigm. We can see the kingdom as a field or the king going to war or a man given five talents. We can look at those other paradigms and nothing moves our heart as much as seeing the kingdom through the lens of a bride's heart. This is because the Holy Spirit's primary objective is to restore the first commandment to first place in the generation in which the Lord returns. The Holy Spirit's objective is to make the first commandment first, and He's going to do it when we see the kingdom through eyes of love.

NO SENSUAL OVERTONES

Roman numeral II. This is what the message of the Bride of Christ is not, and it's obvious to 99.9 percent of you what it's not. I have to say it, or at least put it in print, because every now and then I'll hear someone, here or abroad, say something that's bizarre, and I'll say, "No. No. That's not what the bridal paradigm is." So, I go ahead and put it in print. Here, I'll just touch on it a bit. We must reject all sensual overtones to the Bride of Christ message. Jesus isn't our boyfriend. We're lovers of God, not just workers for God. God is the lover of our soul. He's the lover of our soul and we're lovers of God, but Jesus isn't our lover. There's a big difference. I love Allen Hood, but I have never said, "I'm in love with Allen Hood." We're lovers of God and God is the lover of the human race, but God isn't our lover in the sense we use the term in our culture. We love God, but I want us to be careful to not bring sensual overtones to this paradigm. Now, 99.9 percent of us don't do that. We don't go on dates with Jesus. We have personal time with Him, receiving the kiss of the Word. It has nothing to do with kissing God physically. One man said, "I'm not going to kiss God." I said, "Don't worry, you don't have to. It's a metaphor. It's the kiss of God touching your heart."

THE GOSPEL ROMANCE: HEROIC ABANDONMENT

It's the spiritual interpretation of the Song of Solomon, which we'll spend a session studying, or the reference to the "romance of the Gospel," a term I've used over the years. It has nothing to do with sensuality, holding hands, or kissing. That's not what I mean by *romance*. I mean the adventuresome love that's filled with the spirit of abandonment. It is fearless, courageous, costly, demanding, heroic love. It risks everything; it demands everything. That's what I mean by the romance of the Gospel: it costs everything and there's no escape hatch. We were built for that kind of love. It moves us to live that way. The example I've used over the years for the romance of the Gospel is Paul and Silas. They're beaten and in prison, but they're singing and praising—singing love songs: "We love You! We love You, Jesus! It's our privilege!" That's what I call the romance of the gospel. They're so moved in their love for Him that it doesn't matter who beats them, or what prison they're in; they're focused on who He is to them. That's a heroic, fearless, courageous, and adventuresome way to live. That's what I mean. I don't mean holding hands, date nights, or Jesus as our boyfriend. I don't mean anything like that. He's the lover of our souls.

THE BODY OF CHRIST IN THE AGE TO COME

Paragraph B. We're not married to Jesus in this age. The Bible describes us as betrothed, or engaged to Him. The consummation of the marriage, if you use the human analogy, is when we stand before Him face-to-face.

There's no physical overtone to that. Every now and then I'll hear one of the single ladies talking about being married to Jesus. We don't marry Jesus in this age. No person by extra devotion is more married to Jesus in the age to come. The whole Body of Christ is married to Him in the age to come.

WHAT BEING SINGLE MEANS

Finally paragraph C. I've met different people who are committed to living singly. I say, "Well, being single doesn't mean you're married to Jesus in a special way." That's not what that means. The blessing of being single is that you live with undistracted devotion to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:32–34). That's the blessing of living singly before the Lord. It's a great blessing from a biblical point of view, an honor, and it's a very godly lifestyle. The blessing isn't that single people who live for the Lord are married and the others aren't married to the Lord. That's not their reward. Rather, they have the anointing and blessing of undistracted devotion; that's their reward for singleness. We're all equally married to the Lord in the age to come. We're betrothed to Him right now. That's enough of what the message isn't. Now we're going to focus on what it is.

AS HEIRS OF HIS POWER

Top of page two. Men and women are called the Bride of Christ just as men and women are called to be sons of God. "Son of God" and "Bride of Christ" describe a position of privilege before the throne of God. The privilege of being the sons of God or the Bride of Christ has nothing to do with male or female. This privilege transcends gender. It's bigger than being male or female.

Paragraph B. As the sons of God, both men and women, we're in a position of privilege. We are in a position to experience God's throne as heirs of His power. When we think of the power of God, the throne of God, it's the sons-of-God position before God, men and women. As the Bride of Christ we experience His heart; we experience His desire and His emotion. It has nothing to do with being male or female—neither of these great and glorious positions—because these positions of privilege are far beyond what the angels have. These two positions before God are unique in their glory.

NOT A CALL TO BE LESS MASCULINE

Paragraph D. Most women don't struggle with the idea of being sons of God. It's not like I talk to a lady and she says, "Me? A son of God?" and turns red. They don't do that, because they don't see it as a call to be less feminine. It doesn't even cross their minds that they're supposed to be like a boy now. It means they have access to the throne of God and that they're heirs to His power. Men struggle with the idea of being the Bride of Christ because they wrongly conclude that it's a call to be less masculine. That's not what it is. "Sons of God" isn't a call to be less feminine for the ladies. "Bride of Christ" isn't a call to be less masculine for the men. These describe a position of privilege before God's heart, or to God's throne. Men are nervous about this.

They say, "I can't say the bride thing..."

I say, "You have a wrong view of this analogy."

When I preach the Song of Solomon series or the Bride of Christ series, I won't let them put a girl with a dress and pink and flowers on the cover. I say, "Don't put any of that on the literature when I make a series. I want King David, a warrior king, as the Bride of Christ."

That throws people off a little: "I thought this was the Bride..."

I say, “It’s the man near God’s heart.”

Experiencing the Bride of Christ, the truth of encountering God’s heart, doesn’t undermine a man’s masculinity; rather, it strengthens it. I’m speaking this language so you can use this language when you’re talking to others, especially that friend of yours who likes it a little, but draws back because of the word *bride*.

SOME GREAT MEN LIVED IN BRIDAL IDENTITY

Paragraph E. Some of the greatest men in history functioned in the reality of the Bride of Christ. They didn’t use the term—well, some of them did—but the reality of their connection with God’s heart is the essential reality of the Bride of Christ truth. King David, the great warrior king of Israel, was a lovesick worshiper. He was ravished by God’s desire for him. He was overcome by how much God liked him. He was fascinated with the beauty of God. Beloved, that’s the bridal paradigm in the Old Testament context. David was living in that reality. The great warrior king was the great worshiper. David was a man after God’s own heart. In part, what that means is that he was a student of the heart and emotions of God. God said, “This man is after My heart. He’s pursuing the knowledge of My heart; He’s a student of My emotions.” It’s more than that, but that’s part of being a man after God’s own heart. We want to be students of God’s emotions. That’s a Bride of Christ reality.

Number two: John the apostle said five times, “I’m the one whom God loves.” Jesus called him “the son of thunder.” He was a man’s man in every sense of the word. Yet, he said, “I am the one God loves.” He laid his head on Jesus’ chest; he identified himself as the one who loved God, this son of thunder. It didn’t undermine his masculinity at all.

Think of John the Baptist, the great, fiery prophet. Jesus called him the greatest man ever born of a woman. “No man has ever been greater than him” (Mt. 11:11, paraphrased). John is the one who heard the voice of the Messiah as the Bridegroom (Jn. 3:29). He said, “I see the Messiah as a Bridegroom God. I have heard His voice and it has filled me with joy” (Jn. 3:29, paraphrase). Here we have the greatest man ever born of a woman, and he’s filled with joy because he sees the Messiah as the Bridegroom God.

WITH GOD IN MUTUAL ABANDONMENT

Paragraph A. What is the Bridegroom message? It’s intimacy with God. Again, intimacy with God is its most foundational idea, but it’s intimacy with God based on two-way wholeheartedness, or two-way abandonment. Jesus gave all; we give all. That’s the basis of our intimacy. We are equally yoked in love because we give all to the relationship. Not that our alls are equal; His all is bigger than our all, but it’s still our all that we bring to the relationship. That’s where we have intimacy, because we’ve given all that we have to the relationship. That’s the essential reality of the message of the Bride of Christ truth. We are called to experience His emotions. We’re going to experience the secrets of His heart. He has secrets He wants to tell us. He knows our secrets, even the secrets of our heart that we don’t fully know ourselves. He knows our heart better than we know our own heart. There’s an exchange of the secrets of the heart that are a part of this relationship. We’re called to experience His emotions, secrets, and commitments to us. We’re called to respond in that Song of Solomon 8:7 way: “If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised” (Song 8:7). He wouldn’t need any recognition for it at all; the anointing to love, the ability to love, is the reward.

TO ABIDE IN HIM IS AN INTIMATE FELLOWSHIP

Jesus spoke of intimacy with God by calling us to abide in Him. That's the call of intimacy with God. The clearest analogy He gave is in John 15:4: "Abide in Me," He said. "My heart and your heart connected, flowing together, communicating together, sharing all—this is where we're going" (Jn.15:4–11, paraphrased). The abiding in the vine is a picture of sharing fully with one another. He is the source of life, but it's only when we're fully yielded and we give our all to the relationship.

THE HOLY SPIRIT SEARCHES AND REVEALS THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD'S HEART

I'll share a few of my favorite verses on intimacy with God, which is the Bride of Christ reality. 1 Corinthians 2:10, "For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God." Imagine God the Holy Spirit. He's as much God as the Father. Here, He's pictured as searching the Father's heart. Wow. I look at that verse and I tremble. It makes me quiet. Instead of the word *search*, you could say, "The Holy Spirit discerns the deep things of the Father's heart." Paul goes on to say, in verse 12, that He reveals them to us so that we would freely experience them. The Spirit discerns the deep things of the heart of the Father and the Son, and He reveals them to us. This is one of the grand passages describing intimacy with God's heart.

Beloved, I want to know the deep things of His heart to the fullest capacity that I can receive them. Elsewhere, Paul prays, "That you would be able to comprehend the width, length, and height—the vast ocean of God's love" (Eph. 3:18–19, paraphrased)—which speaks of His love, or His affections for us. To *know* means to experience. I want to comprehend and experience those affections. I want to feel a little of what He feels about me. It's our inheritance to do this.

RECEIVING IS BASED ON YOUR HUNGER

Paragraph C. Top of page three. These verses will challenge you. Reading from the NASB in John 10:14–15, Jesus says, "I know My own"—put on your seatbelt—"I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father" (Jn. 10:14, NASB). I look at that verse and I just stare at it. What Jesus is doing is revealing the intention of His heart—where things are headed, and that to which He is committed. I say, "Lord, I don't know You like You and the Father know each other."

Jesus is saying, "This is what I'm committed to in our relationship: I will take you as far as you want to go in this age. I can only give you up to your capacity to receive. Your capacity to receive is based on your hunger to pursue." The Lord will only give us to the capacity we have to receive. Our capacity is based on our hunger to pursue Him. I don't mean for a month, or even a year. I'm talking about the way you have pursued God for the last ten years, the last five or ten years, determines your capacity level to receive from Him. It's not an earning thing. It's a positioning ourselves, because God simply won't give us what we can't receive. He won't force us to hunger for more. Our hunger to pursue Him is what increases our capacity—not for a week or a month or a summer—but for a decade, two decades, three decades. That's what gets us in the way for this.

Jesus is saying, "This is what I have for you." We must not settle for less, because Jesus won't settle for less. This is what He wants in the relationship. He says, "I want you to know Me like the Father and I know each other." Beloved, we can't be content with anything less. I don't care how dynamic our ministry might be. You may have the most dynamic ministry, but the Lord says, "I have more for you than just what you do in your public ministry. I want you to know Me and I want to connect with you like the Father and I connect. That's what I'm committed to in our relationship."

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

One difference between Christianity and world religions is experiencing intimacy with God. There are many differences: it's based on mercy, a totally free gift, and there are quite a few more—the indwelling Spirit, the New Jerusalem—we could go on and on. Islam knows nothing of the Bridegroom God. If you talk to a Muslim about a Bridegroom God, they would be likely to say, “What?” But we're talking about a God with a burning heart who wants to know us at the heart level, who wants to share His government with us out of love, not pressure. He's not being forced into a corner. He's the one who came up with the idea of a partner forever, likened to a marriage. In fact, marriage in the age to come is of a spiritual order.

JESUS WANTS US TO PARTAKE

Paragraph D. There's intimacy. Now I want to take a different word: partnership. That's much of the same, but it demonstrates a different facet of the diamond. Jesus wants to share His power and His heart. Intimacy is a sharing of His heart and His power. It's both of these, but I want to put forth this idea: He's compelled to share His power with us. He wants us to be with Him. He wants to build His kingdom with us. He wants us to govern with Him. Of the glory the Father gave Him, He says, “I want you with Me when the glory is manifest; I want you to partake of it” (Jn. 17:22, paraphrased). This glory is that manifest presence of God. God doesn't give His glory to man; no one worships man. No one worships one of the saints. In that sense, God never gives His glory. He never allows one of His vessels to be worshiped, but He does share His glory in the sense of His own manifest power and presence; He shares it with the saints.

Remember the verse that we looked at in the last session, John 17:24: “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me” (Jn. 17:24). He's saying, “I don't want to rule without her next to Me. I want to rule the nations, My inheritance, but with her at My side all over the earth, and connected to Me. The only way I want to rule is with her” (paraphrased). In Revelation 3, which we looked at in the last session, Jesus speaks of the one who overcomes, who presses in to obedience. It doesn't mean they are perfect, but when they sin, they repent, rise back up, and reenter the battle for obedience in their life. Jesus says, “I will grant [them] to sit with Me on My throne” (Rev. 3:21). They won't just sit on a throne; they will sit and govern with Jesus. It's a partnership.

THE LORD DOESN'T WANT EMPLOYEES

Look at Mark 16:20: “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them.” The Lord doesn't want us working for Him; He wants us working with Him. That's a common little preacher statement I've heard over the years, but Jesus means this in a very real sense. He wants dialogue. He wants connectedness. He wants the giving of our heart to Him all the way through the process. He doesn't want us to simply ask Him to bless our endeavors when we're out there. He wants us to be talking to Him throughout the process of preparing, within the process of ministry, and after the ministry is over. He wants friendship and partnership. He wants to talk about every phase of it. He wants to be with us in our excitement, our frustration, our pain, and our victories. He wants to share it all with us. He says, “I want to be a partner in love. I don't want to be your employer; I want to be your partner. I actually want to talk to you about it every step along the journey. The positives and the negatives; I want to be with you in it all.” That really changes our paradigm about the work of the ministry.

JESUS IS GENTLE, EVEN IN OUR FAILURES

Paragraph E. As the Bride of Christ, He delights in us. That's one of the features of a bride and a bridegroom: delight and pleasure. Jesus is filled with delight. He is filled with gentleness. He treats us with gentleness, even

in our weakness. King David said in Psalm 18, “He delights in me” (v. 19, paraphrased), and, “He’s gentle with me” (v. 35, paraphrased). That’s why I have a future; because He’s gentle with me in my failures. Therefore I have a future to be great in the fear of God one day. I have a future because He doesn’t cut me off, because He’s gentle with me. The Lord has pleasure in His people. He doesn’t just forgive us; He actually likes us. He likes the relationship. He likes us more than we like us. He likes you more than you like you. You would write you off long before He would write you off, because He won’t write you off.

THE GLADNESS OF HIS DISPOSITION TOWARD US

A bit different and similar, but not the same, is the gladness. When I talk about delight, I talk about how He enjoys us in the relationship. When I talk about gladness, I’m talking about His disposition as the Bridegroom God. He’s the happiest Man who ever walked the earth—not giddy, not silly. Some people connect joy and happiness with silliness. I’m not putting it there; I’m saying He has a happy spirit, a free spirit. He was anointed with the oil of gladness more than any of his companions (Ps. 45:7; Heb. 1:9), meaning: more than any other man in the human race, He had more joy and gladness in His Spirit.

Many people throughout church history have been raised with a view that God is mostly mad or mostly sad when He relates to us. God is either mad, meaning you’re really in trouble, or you’re not in trouble, but He’s sad; He’s grieved. He says, “You’re not in trouble; I’m in pain, but you’re not in trouble.” He’s either mad and they’re in trouble, or He’s sad and grieved by looking at them, shaking His head and saying, “What am I going to do with you?” That’s the view that many people are raised up in the kingdom to believe. Well-meaning people have used that approach, thinking that if you can convince someone that God is mad at you, you can wake them up. If you can convince them that He’s really grieved with you, you can get them going. The truth is, the human spirit is motivated far more consistently to be faithful and diligent when it knows that He’s smiling when He relates to them. My desire isn’t to find the most effective approach and go with it. I want the truth. The truth is what I care about. Yes, He’s angry at rebellion; He’s grieved at persistent compromise, even in the lives of those who love Him but are constantly drawing back. Yet, He’s glad in His Spirit over a believer who is immature, struggling, failing, but consistently recommitting to be wholehearted in love to Him. He has gladness in His Spirit towards that relationship.

That’s really good news. When I come before the Lord, I imagine Him with a smile on His face, with a happy countenance, and not saying, “Ahhh, man! What am I going to do with you? Again? The same story again?” That’s not the way He relates to us. He’s angry sometimes, but here is the good news: God lives for billions and billions and billions and billions and billions of years. He’s only mad for one-thousandth of one percent of the time. Think about billions of years. He’s not mostly mad; He’s mostly glad—forever. David said, “In Your presence is fullness of joy” (Ps. 16:11). The closer you get to His presence, the more you realize His throne is the epicenter of joy in the universe. I’m not talking about giddiness or silliness; I’m talking about the profound joy that God Himself has. The very epicenter of the universe—His throne—is filled with joy. That’s part of the bridal paradigm. Who wants to be married to someone who’s mad all the time? The One we can relate to is glad. He can be angry and He can be sad, but He’s mostly glad.

HE WILL TELL US THE SECRETS OF HIS HEART

Paragraph G. The issue of secrets. I’m saying this in the most positive way. The knowledge of secrets is intimate communication at the heart level. Jesus entrusts the secrets of His heart to His Bride. “The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him” (Ps. 25:14). There are many things He will give to us in time, through His Word, but He will even now interpret the Word for us in a way that excites our heart. For billions of years He

will tell us His secrets. I don't mean only next week in your Bible study time; He will give us His secrets forever. It's in His heart to share His heart with us in a way far beyond what He speaks to the angels. As a matter of fact, in Ephesians 3:10, Paul tells us that the angels and demons, the powers and principalities, look at the Church to figure out God's plan. God doesn't give it to them directly; they look at the Church to understand where this is going.

THE LORD SEES THE SECRETS OF YOUR HEART

We're talking about our hearts now. Jesus rejoices and weeps with us. He commands us in the Bible to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15) because it's an expression of love. Who loves better than He? He rejoices with us when we rejoice, and He weeps with us when we weep. He understands the secret aspects of our life that are unknown, unnoticed, and misunderstood by everyone else. There are facets of your life that are unknown to everyone but you. You don't even fully understand them yourself, but He understands them. Some of them are good and some of them cause pain in your life. He's either rejoicing or has sadness with you, but, either way, He's with you. He's on your team.

HE'S WITH YOU IN THE BREAKTHROUGHS AND IN THE SETBACKS

I'm saying that in a figurative sense, but even more than that. He's for you in this. He's not trying to bust you. He has plenty of information to bust you if that were on His mind, but He's not trying to find a way to expose you and break you. He has had plenty of that information for lots of years if He wanted to bust you. That's not what's on His mind. He wants you to know He's with you in the breakthrough, as well as in the pain and the setbacks. He's with you; His heart is with you. He cares about what you think. He feels it with us. There are issues in our life unknown by anyone else—good issues as well as bad. I don't mean just sin issues, but troubles that no one else knows about. He knows them. There are issues in your life that are unnoticed by everyone—things you care about, things you think about often, and no one even knows that you care about them. He does. He really does. There are things about your heart that are misunderstood. Even you don't fully understand them, but He does. He has intimate knowledge of our victories, the passions of our heart, our sacrifices, our pains, and failures. He understands them all. This is a vast subject. I just want to give you the broad strokes of intimacy with God, our Bridegroom God. He actually cares about what's in our heart and He's with us in it. His eyes are on us, and He's partnering with us in it. That's the idea.

JESUS CLEANSSES US BY THE WORD

Top of page four. He cherishes us. Jesus cherishes us. Paragraph H. Paul said that Jesus cleansed the Church by the Word (Eph. 5:26). He cleanses the Church so profoundly that He will present her as glorious. He's going to so cleanse the Church by His Word that she will live in the glory of God in victory. Those are great points, but here is the point I'm focusing on here: How does He do it? He does it by nourishing and cherishing the Church. He nourishes us by His Word, by speaking His Word. He speaks His Word to us by our own private time in the Bible. He speaks the Word to us when ideas come to us as we're going along in our day. God will inspire an idea in a setting like this through someone else talking or singing or testifying. He will speak the Word to you in a dream. You might look at a sunset and be inspired about something from His Word. He speaks His Word in many, many ways to us: in music and testimonies and dramas and songs and friendship and encouragement and sharing. You could be speaking to someone else and speak a word of inspiration to them that ends up cleansing you. I've done it many times: I'm talking to someone and something comes out of my mouth that I didn't even think about. It's inspired.

THE TENDER NOURISHMENT OF JESUS

That's how simply prophecy works. You give an inspired encouragement and the man says, "Wow, I never thought about that before."

I say, "Wow. I'm going to be encouraged by that! That's for me, too!"

You do it all the time: as you are speaking, the very words from your own mouth are His Word washing you. It really is true. He does it many ways. But here is the point: He nourishes you. To *nourish* is to build up, to give strength to your spirit, to put the vitamins and the nutrients into your spirit, your spiritual life. It's more than nutrients and more than a healthy diet. He cherishes; He's tender. Yes, it's nutrients, but with affection, with care, with great value. He gives us nutrients and puts great value around it. That's a vast subject.

HIS BEAUTY FASCINATES OUR HEARTS

Paragraph I. As the Bridegroom God, He possesses an indescribable beauty that fascinates our hearts. All heaven is fascinated by the beauty of Jesus—forever. It's a big subject and a pain to move on to the next thing. These are giant points, every one of them, and vast.

GOD LOVES US AS GOD LOVES GOD

He has fiery affections. It's more than value and cherishing and tenderness. He has burning desire. That's part of the Bridegroom revelation. God loves us in the way that God loves God. Jesus feels the same intensity of love for us that the Father feels for Him (Jn. 15:9). I love this verse. In the way that the Father loves Jesus, Jesus loves Mike Bickle. That's how I read it. "Wow!" He loves me as much as the Father loves Him! Beloved, He loves you as much as the Father loves Him; that's how much He loves you. That makes every single member in the body of Christ His favorite one. It's really true. He can't improve on His love for you; He can't increase it. It cannot increase. I'm His favorite one and so are you. So are a billion others. The problem is that only a small percent ever take hold of that.

HE DESIRES EXCLUSIVE LOVE AND PARTNERSHIP

Paragraph K. He has fiery desire. This is the core issue. What it really comes down to is, *abandonment* or *wholeheartedness*. We can use either word. Jesus gives all to us, and we give all to Him in the relationship. He wants the first commandment to be in first place in our life. He desires exclusivity; He desires abandonment. Sometimes we talk about the bridal paradigm with respect to His tenderness and His mercy. A man doesn't marry a woman out of mercy; he marries her out of a desire for exclusive love and partnership. I would never think of going to my wife and saying, "I'm a bridegroom, and you're my bride. I will relate to you in mercy." That would completely throw her off: "Mercy? Well, I appreciate that..." Mercy is a very important part of the relationship, but the bridal paradigm isn't mostly about mercy; it's about partnership and abandonment. No woman wants to relate to her husband based on mercy. He's kind with her frailty, but it's built on the desire for exclusive love and partnership.

HE WAS RICH, YET FOR US BECAME POOR

Paragraph L. Jesus abandoned all to establish relationship. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8, "He was rich, yet for your sakes became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9). He embraced poverty. He gave up everything to win us and to be in relationship with us forever. Beloved, that's abandonment; that's wholeheartedness. This is real. He really, really did this. He wants us to be willing, too. It doesn't matter what wealth we have: wealth in our reputation, wealth in money, wealth in honor, or whatever the wealth is. He wants us, not necessarily to give it all away—

that's not the point—but to truly, genuinely submit it to His leadership, for real. A lot of people say, “That money is the Lord's,” until the Lord wants it. Then, they don't have a release.

ABANDONMENT BEYOND COMPREHENSION

He became a man, obedient unto death (Phil. 2:5–8). He gave up everything for the relationship. This is intense; this is wholehearted. It is abandonment beyond anything we could comprehend.

Paragraph M. Psalm 45. This is one of the premiere verses in the Old Testament on this subject. At some point, we really need to get Psalm 45 into this class—I'm speaking to myself right now—and lay out all the different parts of the bridal paradigm that fit with Psalm 45, because Psalm 45 is the jam-packed bridal paradigm psalm. So many of the main points are in that one psalm. “Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear” (Ps. 45:10). The Scripture emphasizes: “Consider. Listen. Pay really close attention. Incline your ear. Go out of your way to hear what I'm going to tell you. Put some effort into listening closely. I'm about to tell you something that will affect your entire life.” That's what it means to incline your ear: to pay close attention to what's going to be said next.

THE ABANDONMENT OF OUR ALL MOVES HIM

“Forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty” (vss. 10–11a). This is the idea. This is the bridal heart of abandonment. The forgetting of our people and our father's house doesn't indicate doing so in the strictest sense. It's not saying that if we know someone in our father's family line, we can't be in love with them. That's not the point. Our loyalty to Jesus is so preeminent in all our relationships and resources because, particularly in the ancient world, our honor, identity, and resources would lie there, within our father's house, our family line, and our people. Every generation received the wealth, and the honor, or the poverty and the shame of the former generation. What He's saying is, you're so committed to Jesus' leadership and the primacy of your relationship with Him that even the honor and wealth, resources and family line is secondary. This is for real, not sort of, but for real. If you would respond to Him at that level, the King would greatly desire your beauty. He loves us no matter what, but there's a beauty in that kind of abandonment that moves Him. It moves Him.

I think of the song that Misty sings: “How far will You let me go? How abandoned will You let me be?” It's one of those theme songs around here on the subject of the Bride of Christ. The Bride of Christ isn't mostly about how tender He is, though He is. The Bride of Christ is the revelation of His abandonment and our response of abandonment because we know it moves Him. Therefore, it moves us. When we're moved, He's moved; when He's moved, we're moved. It's the relationship of moved hearts. That's the subject of the bridal paradigm.

THE CYCLE OF IMPACT

Paragraph N. Jesus is responsive to our love. Foundational to the Bride of Christ is the truth about our impact on His heart, His impact on our heart, and our impact on His heart. It's a cycle of impact. We impact Him and it impacts us. We impact Him and He leads the relationship. He's God. He opens His heart in such a real way that what we decide, even in our weakness, really does move Him, and He remembers it forever. That's what the bride and bridegroom relationship is all about. Number one, a woman doesn't want to relate to her husband based primarily on mercy, but on partnership, respect, and feeling beautiful in his eyes. You could add many things to that, such as enjoying talking together and enjoying being together.

DO YOU ENJOY TALKING TO YOUR BELOVED?

I tell you, young people come and say, “I like this guy,” or, “I like this gal.” “They’re really this and they’re really that.” These are all really good things.

But the big question I always ask them is this: I say, “I have one question.” There are several, really, but this is the big one: “Do you enjoy talking to him?”

“Well, he’s really cute—but he talks about himself the whole time, and he’s not a good listener.”

I say, “That’s not a good point. I’m not just making a point that he’s selfish, but that you actually don’t like talking to him. Does he like talking to you? I don’t mean, “Does he like looking at you?” Does he actually like talking to you? Looking at you is cool, but that’s not enough. That’s good, but not enough. Partnership is based upon actually enjoying talking to your partner. It’s a very important thing.”

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PARADIGMS

Paragraph two. I talk about the difference between the marriage paradigm and the father paradigm. Marriage is very different from the parent/child relationship. In marriage there’s mutual partnership. Both partners bring everything to the table: all their money, all their time, their futures, their goals, their bodies—they bring everything to the relationship. In a father/son relationship, the son may say, “Hey Dad, I’m in. I’m not in on that level, but I’ll put a little money into it. I’ll check in with you later.” There’s no assumption that all the money is the same. It’s two different issues. The bridal paradigm is the issue of abandonment. They bring all to the relationship in the fullest sense of the word. That’s the emphasis. Using the human analogy, the bridal paradigm is a call and a beckoning to abandonment.

“WHOEVER DOES NOT BEAR HIS CROSS CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE”

Top of page five. I’m going to make another point or two and then we’ll end. Luke 14 is one of the premiere passages on the bridal paradigm. This is Jesus calling for abandonment and loyal love. He didn’t declare Himself as the Bridegroom in this passage, but this expresses the heart of the Bridegroom, right here. He’s speaking on the same theme as Psalm 45: “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Lk. 14:26). “If he doesn’t hate his family line in comparison to his loyalty to Me,” is what He’s saying. The Lord doesn’t want us to hate our families, but He wants us to have such loyalty to Him that even if we lose out with our family, we’ll stay true to Him. He said, “He cannot be My disciple; he cannot be My partner at this level. Whoever doesn’t bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (v. 27, paraphrased).

IN TAKING UP OUR CROSS, WE BEGIN TO BE EQUALLY YOKED

The subject of bearing the cross, or anything having to do with self-denial, is very unpopular in much of the Body of Christ today. We can’t be partners on a deep level if we don’t embrace self-denial. We can be saved; we may even have the Lord’s blessing in our life to some degree, but we can’t have a profound and deep partnership with Him. This is because, by taking up our cross, we enter into that journey of becoming equally yoked with Him in love, because He took up His cross. This is what He cares about; nothing moves Him like this. Because He did it, He gets it. It moves Him because it’s very deep and personal when we take up our cross. When we deny ourselves, it’s a profoundly deep and personal thing. When we do it for love, it moves His heart, for real. Even though someone else might not know or even care, it moves Him because it’s so deep—and He did it so well and so thoroughly.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO LOVE WITHOUT OBEDIENCE

Paragraph P. In John 14:21, Jesus ties obedience to love. There's no such thing as loving God on our own terms. Our love for God must be on His terms, in the context of our commitment to obey. We can fail, and I have failed many times. But in our failure to obey, we can't rationalize our sin and disobedience. We call it sin, repent of it, get right back into the battle, and right back into warring against that area of disobedience. The Lord still calls that a spirit of obedience in our lives. You could fail today, and, within the hour, you're repenting and you're back. You push delete. You're a first-class citizen once more, and you're warring against the issue in which you failed one hour ago. The spirit of your life is still a spirit of obedience. We're not talking about perfect maturity; we're talking about a heart set to obey. There's no such thing as loving Jesus without a spirit of obedience. Some people think of loving Jesus in a sentimental way. If they cry in worship, that must be the big proof. I like to cry in worship, and I do it a lot. But that's not the big proof. It's fun, but the real issue by which I measure my love for Him is the spirit of obedience: the setting of my heart—not even the attaining—but the setting of my heart to be sincere about it. Those are the terms that He requires.

THE CORE REALITY: ABANDONMENT

I'll end with paragraph S. I've mentioned this a time or two before, but I want to mention it one more time. The revelation of the Bridegroom, filled with tenderness, leads some believers to laziness. I've seen it over the years, because I've preached on the Bride of Christ here for years. There are people who are into the Bride, into the Bridegroom, and they live a passive, lazy life, claiming the Bride of Christ doctrine as their justification. Why? Because they have never seen the revelation of His heart of abandonment and the desire He has for our abandonment, which is the core reality of the Bride of Christ message.

Lord, we say yes to You. Amen.