

Session 10: Forerunners as Friends of the Bridegroom

I. Friends of the Bridegroom

1. Above all else, John the Baptist was a friend of the Bridegroom.

- a. John the Baptist said this about his ministry calling, “He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease” (Jn. 3:29-30).
- b. In this brief passage, John makes several very important statements about his forerunner call. First, he introduces for the first time Jesus as the Bridegroom God. In saying this, he suggested that Jesus was not only Israel’s Messiah, but He was also their Bridegroom King. And at the same time, he introduced a major theme of the New Testament, and a critical part of God’s eternal purpose— Christ as the Bridegroom King.
- c. Second, John told Israel that Jesus would have a bride taken from among the people of God. In saying *He who has the bride*, he was clarifying that Jesus would have a bride from among the people of God, and was alerting the people of God to a coming bridal relationship into which Jesus would invite His people.
- d. Third, John made the point that as a forerunner he was not the Bridegroom of the people, but merely a friend of the Bridegroom. In other words, in his role he was not to draw the bride to himself in any way but to lead the bride to Jesus as their Bridegroom.
- e. Fourth, John knew that as he ministered in this role, he must decrease in the sight of the people in order to exalt Christ as their Bridegroom. In essence, John was taking his hands completely off the bride and devoting his full attention to assisting the people of God to pursue this Man Christ and to do it as a bride would pursue her Bridegroom.

2. In a similar way, forerunners must be friends of the Bridegroom.

- a. Forerunners functioning as friends of the Bridegroom is a major assignment for the forerunner. Inviting the unsaved world and the church into a bridal relationship with Christ is a central tenet of the forerunner call. There are several reasons for this, some of which are summarized below. First and foremost, the Father loves the Son and desires for Him to have His bride. In the same passage that Jesus is revealed as a Bridegroom God, John made this brief but profound statement, “The Father loves the Son” (Jn. 3:35). In the Father’s deep love for His Son, He longs for His Son to have an equally yoked bride to be at His Son’s side forever.
- b. A second reason why it is crucial that forerunners function as friends of the Bridegroom is that a glorious bride is to be presented to Jesus at the conclusion of the church age. At the culmination of the church age, Christ will receive His bride in all her glory,

...that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh,

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but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:27-32).

- c. Although the above passage speaks of Christ and His church, the passage intertwines the idea of Christ and His glorious church with the idea of a husband and a wife. He concludes the passage by making it clear that in the passage He is speaking of Christ and His church *in a bridal relationship*. In other words, Christ will have a bride without spot or wrinkle and blameless in all her glory presented to Him at His coming.
- d. Third, Revelation 19:7 unveils that when the bride is made ready, the church age will conclude and Christ will return,

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints... And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war (Rev. 19:7-8, 11).

- e. Thus, we see that when the bride is made ready, the eternal purpose of the church age will have been fulfilled and the Lord will return.
- f. A fourth reason for forerunners to operate as friends of the Bridegroom is that there is much ignorance in the global church concerning the church's bridal relationship with Christ. Much of the church knows that the church is the bride, but knows very little else about the need for the bride to be made ready in order for the eternal purpose of the church age to be fulfilled. Therefore, there is a great need for the church to gain revelation and insight concerning the variety of issues about the church's bridal relationship with Christ.
- g. Therefore, there is a great need in our day for forerunners to function as friends of the bridegroom to assist believers to make themselves ready for their wedding day with Christ and the marriage supper of the Lamb.

3. Forerunners must not take the bride for themselves.

- a. Before moving on, one word of caution is important for forerunners to understand. Forerunners must function as friends of the Bridegroom and *not* as the Bridegroom. Friends of the Bridegroom must not draw the bride to themselves in any way. The forerunner is to be totally focused on preparing a bride for Christ and Him alone.
- b. The book of Esther presents a beautiful type and shadow of the relationship between Christ as Bridegroom King and the bride. It illustrates the invitation, preparation, intimacy, and authority of the bride as she pursues Christ as her Bridegroom King. There is much more to the story than we can state here, but one point to illustrate is the role of the eunuchs in their preparation of Esther for the king.

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- c. It is disgusting to think that the king's eunuchs were men who had been castrated for the purpose of serving in the king's harem. Nevertheless, the purpose for making them a eunuch was so that they would not be able to take the women for themselves. In a sense, forerunners are to be spiritual eunuchs for the Lord. Note a few things stated about the eunuchs in the book of Esther. First, they served in the presence of the king (Esther 1:10). They were in the king's court for one purpose—to serve the king. Second, they oversaw those being prepared to be the wife of the king. They were there to take the women through the preparation process, giving them their myrrh baths, cosmetics, and food (Esther 2:9). Third, they advised the women on how to please the king (Esther 2:15). Just like the eunuchs in King Ahasuerus' court, this is the role forerunners are to play as friends of the Bridegroom. They serve totally for the pleasure of Christ with no agenda other than to prepare a bride for their King. Their role is to oversee the preparation of the bride leading them and advising them how to please the Lord so that the bride is made ready.
- d. If forerunners are to operate as friends of the Bridegroom, it is necessary that they understand the biblical process of the bride making herself ready. Let's look at that next.

II. Overview of the Bridal Relationship

1. The different aspects of a Jewish wedding during the days of the New Testament parallel the church making herself ready as a bride for Christ.

- a. There are five basic steps that comprised the traditional Jewish wedding system during the days of the New Testament. They are: 1) the arrangement of marriage; 2) the betrothal ceremony; 3) the preparation period between the betrothal and the wedding; 4) the wedding ceremony; and 5) the wedding feast. We address each step extensively in two classes which are part of The Forerunner School: *The Eternal Blueprint* and *Understanding the Bride of Christ*. Therefore, we will only touch on the bridal paradigm here.
- b. In the lives of a Jewish couple, once an arrangement was made for the bride and groom to be married, the couple would participate in a betrothal ceremony. At the completion of this ceremony, the couple was legally married even though they did not live in the same house or have sexual relations. Instead, the groom and bride maintained separate dwelling places, both remaining under their fathers' roofs.
- c. Because a betrothed couple was legally married, a separation or parting of ways for any reason would require a legal divorce. The Jews used to refer to the act of betrothal as "taking a wife" by using a form of a Hebrew word that meant "purchase." The betrothal ceremony was considered an act of purchasing or acquiring a wife for the purpose of marriage. At this point, a Jewish woman was referred to as the groom's bride.
- d. Applying this step in the wedding process to a person's relationship with Christ, a truly born again believer has been betrothed to Christ and can be correctly referred to as Christ's bride. Paul said, "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (2 Cor. 11:2).
- e. The next phase of the Jewish wedding was the preparation period, which normally lasted about a year. During this phase, neither the groom nor the bride knew when the wedding would take place;

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the only one who knew was the groom's father, who determined the specific time for the groom to go and get his bride. During this time, the groom remained at his father's home and prepared a place for the two to live. This was normally done by adding a room to his father's house. While the groom was busy building, the bride prepared herself for the upcoming wedding. This usually involved three things. First, the bride was observed for her purity. This custom required at least a full nine months to pass in order to ensure that the bride was not pregnant and to attempt to assure that she was a virgin. Second, the bride consecrated herself. She examined everything in her life and changed whatever was necessary in order to be ready for the holy covenant of marriage. Third, the bride made her own wedding garments. Ancient Jewish women did not have the luxury of going to the nearest bridal shop and purchasing a premade dress. They had to spend hours making their wedding garments and adorning them with the special touches to make them beautiful.

- f. As believers in Jesus, we now live in the preparation period of the bride being made ready for Christ. Jesus has gone back to His Father's house to prepare a place for us. Like the bridegroom in an ancient Jewish wedding, Jesus is preparing a place for us to dwell (John 14:2-3). Contrary to popular opinion, however, Jesus is not building a mansion for us in heaven, where we will live independently from Him for eternity. Rather, Jesus is preparing a place in the new Jerusalem, which will be the dwelling place of the bride for all eternity.
- g. While Jesus prepares our eternal dwelling place, just like an ancient Jewish bride, we are to wait expectantly for His return, prepare our own wedding garments, and consecrate ourselves, setting ourselves apart exclusively for Him as we anticipate our eternal destiny with our beloved Bridegroom.
- h. Notice carefully that the passage quoted earlier (Rev. 19:7-8, 11) reads that "His bride has made *herself* ready." It doesn't say that Jesus makes His bride ready. We see this pictured so well in the ancient Jewish wedding system. It was up to the bride to consecrate herself and make her own wedding garments while her bridegroom was preparing their dwelling. The same is true in our bridal relationship with Jesus. He will not do our part in preparing ourselves and we certainly can't do His part. Though we are utterly dependent upon His grace to be prepared as a worthy bride, we are to pursue His enabling grace, receive His enabling grace, and live by this enabling grace so that we will be ready for our marriage to Christ.
- i. In ancient times, toward the end of the yearlong betrothal period, the bride waited with great expectancy for the groom to come and for the ceremony to take place. When the time was right, the groom's father would issue the approval for the ceremony to begin. The groom and his wedding party would leave the groom's house to go get his bride. The friends of the bridegroom would shout, "Behold, the bridegroom comes!" and then they would blow the shofar. The groomsmen would lead the wedding party through the streets and bring the bride back to the groom's home where the wedding canopy awaited.
- j. Soon, we can expect the Father to say to His Son, "Go and get Your bride. Consummate your marriage." Then, the friends of the Bridegroom will shout, "Behold, the Bridegroom comes", and the bride will be with her Bridegroom forever. The church age and our life on earth is the time when the betrothed bride must be about the task of making herself ready for the second coming of Christ for His bride.

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2. The bride makes herself ready by developing an inward life in Christ.

- a. The bride will be made ready when she matures into full union with Christ. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that the one who has been joined to Christ through salvation and, in our bridal terminology is therefore betrothed to Christ as His bride, is one with Him in spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). Even though the betrothed bride is one in spirit with God (that is in union with Christ in spirit at the moment of salvation), for the bride to be made ready this union must grow through the process of sanctification until the bride matures into full union with Christ in body and soul. Like the passage we referenced earlier from the book of Ephesians “FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church (Eph. 5:31-32). In the context of Ephesians 5, Paul explained that through the process of sanctification (Eph. 5:26) the union that took place in the spirit at salvation is to grow into full union in body and soul so that Christ and His bride become as one—the two shall become one flesh—that is, into full union. When this occurs, the bride will have made herself ready.
- b. One important ingredient of growing into full union with Christ is developing an intimate relationship with Him. In the bridal context, we see the idea of intimacy in the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). In this parable, the oil that keeps the wise virgins’ lamps burning is their hidden life in God—that is, their intimate walk with Christ. As the parable notes, it is this component of their walk with the Lord that allows them to enter the marriage supper of the Lamb. Therefore, the pursuit of an intimate relationship with Christ is an essential ingredient to the bride making herself ready.
- c. A second important ingredient for growing into full union with Christ as His bride is to be conformed into His image in fullness. Speaking about the bride making herself ready, John wrote that the garments of the bride are “the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev. 19:7). We observe the same idea in Ephesians 5 as Paul writes about sanctification being the pathway for the preparation of the glorious bride to be presented to her Bridegroom at His coming (Eph. 5:26-27). Therefore, we note another essential component of the bride making herself ready and that is being conformed into the righteous image of the Righteous One, Christ. The bride makes herself ready by clothing herself with Christ. As believers die to the old man and come alive to the new they are progressively filled with Christ journeying toward the goal of being conformed into the image of Christ in fullness.

3. In addition to the pursuit of full union with Christ, there are other related pursuits that are essential to the bride making herself ready.

- a. The betrothed bride must develop a passionate love relationship with her betrothed Bridegroom longing to be near Him. Near the conclusion of the book of Revelation, these words are written, “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost” (Rev. 22:17). As you read between the lines of this passage, you sense the passion the betrothed bride has for her Bridegroom. There is a longing for Him in her heart. Therefore, part of making oneself ready for our Bridegroom is developing passion for Christ and an ever-present longing for a deeper relationship with Him.

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- b. In a similar vein, the betrothed bride must develop a hunger and thirst for Christ, His presence, the scriptures, to hear His voice, and to encounter Him in myriad of the ways He comes to His people. Therefore, in the heart of the bride, there should be an ever increasing hunger for Christ, His word, His voice, and His presence.
- c. In addition, the betrothed bride must come out of the Babylonian culture that permeates the earth today. Revelation 18:4 records these words, "I heard another voice from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues.'" In this verse, John is relaying a voice from heaven telling the true bride to come out of the snares of the harlot Babylon before it is judged. From this and other passages, we see one more trait the bride must pursue to be made ready—to come out of the evil culture being promulgated by the spirit behind the harlot.
- d. Finally, the betrothed bride must have a strong desire to be made ready. In Luke 14:16-24, Jesus spoke a parable about a man giving a great dinner. In the story, many were invited, but one after another gave an excuse for why they could not attend. One had bought a piece of land. Another had purchased oxen, and a third had recently taken a wife. Each had said "please consider me excused". The parable ends with these words, "For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner" (Lk. 14:24). The point for here is that believers must have a deep desire to be made ready as a bride, to be without excuse, and to do what is necessary to be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.
- e. These issues should give us a pretty good idea of the dramatic transformation that is required in the lives of believers to be made ready as a bride for Christ. Even though when one is born again, they become the betrothed bride for Christ, there is a lifelong journey ahead of them in order to be made ready as the eternal wife of the Lamb.

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

- a. The betrothed bride cannot remain lukewarm toward pursuing these issues we have spoken of. Every believer must radically pursue them. Over my thirty plus years of ministry, I have performed a lot of weddings. One thing I have learned is that every bride is focused. Their wedding day becomes the most important day of their life. There is nothing that can distract them from getting ready for that day. I would say most are radical in their pursuit of that day. Every believer must be like that bride getting ready.
- b. The book of Hebrews makes the truth of radically pursuing the bridal relationship abundantly clear. Let's examine a few examples of saints of old to see how they pursued making themselves ready as a bride and the radical pursuit they lived by as they pursued the bridal relationship. To illustrate the radical pursuit of making ourselves ready as a bride, we will use the idea of the pursuit of the bridal city, the new Jerusalem. The apostle John wrote, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). In recording this truth, John connected the new Jerusalem to the bride, describing it as a bridal city. Thus, as we observe saints of old pursuing the eternal city, we see that they are also pursuing becoming the eternal wife of the Lamb. Just as these faithful witnesses pursued their bridal relationship with the Lord, in a similar manner each of us must do likewise.

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- c. Let's begin with Abraham as an example of pursuing the bridal relationship. He left everything to pursue the bridal city. When God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 12 to leave his homeland and come to a strange land, Abraham obeyed and went to what eventually became the promised land. However, his act of obedience involved much more than the search for a piece of land in the Middle East. He was on a journey to the eternal city, the new Jerusalem. At some point in his journey whether at the beginning of his call or as he went, God gave him a vision of much more than a piece of property. God revealed to Abraham the city of which the architect and builder was God. Read this passage from the book of Hebrews,

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

- d. The vision of the bridal city is what drove Abraham for the rest of his life to lay down every earthly possession and purpose so as to pursue his inheritance—the eternal city of God. When you read the story of Abraham, you see that he went through trial after trial. He made mistakes and sinned along the way. But he never gave up and never turned back. If it had been only a piece of land he was looking for, he might not have thought it worth the laying down of his life. But he had received a glimpse of the bridal city—the new Jerusalem. Because God had revealed it to him, he was determined with all that was in him to reach this goal, and he pursued it with radical abandonment.
- e. A great cloud of faithful witnesses has also pursued the bridal city in spite of trials, tribulation, persecution, and hardship. Hebrews 11 and 12 speaks of this great cloud of faithful witnesses who like Abraham went on their own personal journey toward the bridal city. Note these verses,

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

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

- f. Hebrews 12 reveals to us the reward that Moses and the other witnesses pursued. It reads,

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

- g. All of the great cloud of witnesses, whether they knew it or not, were on a journey to the bridal city,

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and they pursued it with a radical abandonment throughout their life. They laid down their worldly possessions, their desires for this life, their ambitions, and their life in general to allow Christ to fully have control of their life so as to receive the reward of their inheritance—the eternal city of the new Jerusalem. They lived a life as follows,

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

- h. They lived this way to receive a better resurrection, the resurrection as Christ's bride, and to inherit the bridal city, the new Jerusalem.
- i. The attitude of these men and women is the same attitude that believers must have today in pursuing the bridal relationship with Christ. Believers must pursue being made ready with the same radical fervor as did Abraham, Moses, and the great cloud of witnesses. Here is what the author of Hebrews wrote concerning the need to pursue the bridal city,

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:1-2).

- j. Just like those who have gone on before us, we too must become radical in our pursuit of the city not made with hands and to be a bride made ready. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the church has no understanding of the need for the bride to make herself ready and the necessity of a fervent pursuit of those things that are required. Therefore, forerunners are essential to awaken and lead believers in this journey. In this next section, we will dig a little deeper into the role of the forerunner in the effort to make ready a bride for Christ.

III. The Role of Friends of the Bridegroom

1. Jesus parable of the wedding feast highlights the role forerunners must play as friends of the Bridegroom in making ready a bride for Christ.

- a. Matthew 22:1-14 records an important parable that Jesus spoke to His disciples in the days leading up to His going to the cross. The story begins with these words, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son". This introduction sets the context of this parable as being about a bride being made ready for Christ. Briefly summarizing the story, a king is giving a wedding feast for his son. He sends out his slaves to invite people to come. Some were unwilling to come. Others paid no attention to the invitation. Some got mad about the invitation and attacked those who invited them. Finally, the slaves went into the highways and byways inviting

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all who they could and the wedding hall was filled with guests. In the midst of those filling the wedding hall, there was one who was not dressed in wedding clothes. This one was removed from the feast.

- b. As we analyze the parable, there are five categories of characters in the story: 1) slaves who invite people to the wedding feast, 2) people who are invited but intentionally decline to come, 3) people who ignore the invitation, 4) people who accept the invitation and put on wedding clothes, and 5) a person who accepts the invitation but does not put on wedding clothes. In the story, the slaves represent friends of the Bridegroom who serve at the pleasure of the King. The other four categories are people to whom they minister.
- c. There is a lot of information crammed into this brief section of scripture, but for this session, let's focus on the role of the slaves—that is, the friends of the Bridegroom. In the parable, we note two basic functions that forerunners must engage in as friends of the Bridegroom. First, they must operate in the messengerial role to invite people into the pursuit of a bridal relationship, and, second, they must take on the role of a wise master builder to help them be clothed in wedding garments. Let's look at both functions with a specific emphasis on preparing a bride for Christ.

2. Friends of the Bridegroom must function as end-time messengers with a specific emphasis on inviting people to pursue a bridal relationship with Christ.

- a. In Session 7 of this class, we spoke about forerunners as messengers. In that session, we highlighted seven ways messengers invite people into God's eternal purpose. Summarizing from Session 7, forerunners as end-time messengers announce, invite, reason and explain, create an expectancy, clarify what is involved, confront in order to awaken, and warn of the consequences of not accepting the message.
- b. Drawing from what we said in Session 7 but applying it to the need for the bride to make herself ready, friends of the Bridegroom are to announce to individual believers and the corporate church that in our day God is calling for His bride to arise and make herself ready. We live in a time in which this is a major issue in kingdom thought—for the bride to become devoted to being made ready as a bride for Christ. Currently multitudes in the body of Christ are ignorant of what God's intentions are related to His bride, and He is calling friends of the Bridegroom to get up on a high mountain and announce that it is time for the church to awaken to the great need for the bride to arise.
- c. Friends of the Bridegroom must not only announce that the bride must make herself ready, they must also invite believers, pastors, and the church to develop and pursue a bridal identity. Just like in the parable of the wedding feast and also the parable of the great dinner recorded in Luke 14, friends of the Bridegroom were sent out to invite people to the wedding feast and to pursue a bridal relationship with Christ. Friends of the Bridegroom are to invite the church out of erroneous and lesser pursuits and into the pursuit of Christ as Bridegroom King. In doing Lifeschool for almost twenty years, I have been inviting people into a bridal relationship for decades. My experience has been that only a small percentage of people will awaken to the call and begin to pursue it with abandonment. Even so, the Lord has put in my heart the belief that even if they don't accept the invitation, God still wants everyone to get an invitation. Much like the parable of the wedding feast, many will not say "yes" to the call. Even so, the invitation must still go out, and friends of the Bridegroom are given this assignment.

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- d. Friends of the Bridegroom must also be prepared to function in the other tasks we discussed in Session 7. If necessary, they must *reason* and *explain* the bridal paradigm so as to *persuade* the church to accept the invitation to be made ready as a bride for Christ. They must also *create an expectancy* in the hearts of believers for the bridal relationship and the eternal purpose that God has for the prepared bride. Friends of the Bridegroom must cast the vision for the eternal role of the bride in order to give people the desire to lay down all in order to be prepared as a bride for Christ.
- e. Friends of the Bridegroom must also *clarify* misconceptions and any lack of understanding about the bridal relationship with Christ. Many times, there is a real need for friends of the Bridegroom to clarify a myriad of issues related to the bridal relationship with Christ, what is involved in making oneself ready as a bride, and the eternal partnership between the Bridegroom and the bride.
- f. Friends of the Bridegroom will at times *confront* the church in order to awaken them to issues related to preparing a bride for Christ. When the Holy Spirit speaks through messengers in a confrontive way, it is for the purpose of getting the attention and awakening a people to respond. Therefore, at times friends of the Bridegroom must confront believers with the fiery jealousy of the Lord who desires His people to love and follow Him with all of their hearts.
- g. Forerunners as friends of the Bridegroom will also at times *warn* believers of the consequences of not responding to the invitation to make themselves ready as a bride. They must tell them of the vision God has for the prepared bride and what they will lose if they refuse the invitation to make themselves ready.
- h. As you can see, there are a variety of tones and moods that the Holy Spirit might lead forerunners as messengers to speak into the lives of believers, pastors, and entire churches. Even though the approaches might vary, the basic idea is to invite people into the pursuit of a bridal identity which will prepare the betrothed bride to be made ready as a worthy bride for her Bridegroom.

3. Friends of the Bridegroom must also function as wise master builders to assist believers to become a worthy bride for Christ.

- a. In Session 8 of this class, we spoke about forerunners as wise master builders. In that session, we highlighted five ways forerunners functioning as wise master builders assist people to come into God's eternal purpose. In a similar manner, friends of the Bridegroom functioning as wise master builders must assist people in making themselves ready as a prepared bride for Christ.
- b. Highlighting some of the points from Session 8, forerunners functioning as master builders must provide knowledge of the details of the bridal relationship and what is involved in the bride making herself ready for her Bridegroom. Once you begin to study the scriptures on the topic of the bride, you begin to see the idea of a bride for Christ addressed in many places. These many passages highlight a number of issues in which the bride on her journey of making herself ready must embrace. Just like the eunuch Hegai advised Esther on what pleased the king, friends of the Bridegroom must help the bride on her journey of pleasing King Jesus by giving her knowledge and insight of what is involved in making oneself ready as a bride.

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- c. Friends of the Bridegroom functioning as a wise master builder must be prepared to devote a considerable amount of time and energy teaching how to make oneself ready. Over the years, I have preached many messages calling the betrothed bride to make herself ready. The question arises regularly—how? Friends of the Bridegroom must not only invite people to make themselves ready, they also must assist them in knowing what to do to get ready. My experience is that the process of the need for the bride to make herself ready must be slowly and clearly explained in great detail and with a lot of repetition so that people really grasp the significance of it. Friends of the Bridegroom must also devote much time and energy to describing what is involved in the various aspects of making ourselves ready. There are too many components to making oneself ready to discuss here, but the point for now is that friends of the Bridegroom must walk with the bride throughout the journey to assist her much like the eunuchs did with Esther to make the bride ready for Christ.

4. Friends of the Bridegroom must be prepared themselves in order to help make the bride ready.

- a. It is absolutely essential that friends of the Bridegroom be on the same journey themselves that they are leading believers. Forerunners cannot lead anyone anywhere that they are not going themselves. Forerunners must be passionately and deeply committed to making themselves ready as a bride for Christ in order to be used to make others ready. There are several dynamics that should be in action in the life of the friend of the Bridegroom in order to make the forerunner ready to function as a friend of the Bridegroom.
- b. First, friends of the Bridegroom must have a deep knowledge of what the scriptures teach about the bride and the bridal relationship between a believer and Christ. There are quite a number of passages in the scriptures that address our bridal relationship with Christ. Jesus spoke about it in several places. Paul wrote about it. The apostle John wrote about it in the book of Revelation. There are also several Old Testament books that discuss it in type and shadow form. Forerunners who want to be used as friends of the Bridegroom must get familiar with the truths in the scriptures about the bride in order to assist others on their journey.
- c. Second, friends of the Bridegroom must have the truths about the bridal relationship with Christ deeply imbedded in their hearts so that they will be able to communicate the bridal model with simplicity and clarity. Believers live a fast paced life requiring forerunners to be able to communicate the issues simply, deeply, clearly, and concisely.
- d. Third, friends of the Bridegroom must also develop a deep conviction about the journey the bride must take in their pursuit of a bridal relationship with Christ. Forerunners must allow the Holy Spirit to take them deep into the various aspects related to the bride making herself ready so there will be no doubt in their hearts about the call, the preparation, the eternal destiny, and the eternal role that the bride will play. The reason conviction is so important is that most of the body of Christ has little revelation about the bride, and many will question what the scriptures teach about the issue. Friends of the Bridegroom must be prepared to be opposed. The truths about the bride while totally scriptural have been a mystery for centuries and only recently are being revealed to the wider body of Christ. Because of this, many will think the message of the bride is incorrect. Therefore, in addition to the need to have the scriptural foundation in your heart, friends of the Bridegroom must be prepared to defend the message against opposition. Forerunners will face opposition and at times severe resistance about the radical transformation necessary in the life of the believer to be

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made ready as a bride. Because opposition will come, forerunners must know the issues and have strong convictions about these issues.

- e. With this as our mandate, let us all arise as friends of the Bridegroom.