

Prayer Energized by Intimacy with God

INTRODUCTION

I. I am going to give you two of the most significant things the Lord did in my life, paragraphs A and B, in terms of forming the theology and the atmosphere of night and day prayer here at the International House of Prayer.

There are two significant events. I have been in ministry for thirty years, and on two occasions over those thirty years the Lord spoke or communicated to me by His audible voice and gave me direction for ministry. So, these are the two. Two is enough to run a whole lifetime on.

THE AUDIBLE VOICE OF THE LORD

In May 1983, we had gathered together on a twenty-one-day fast. I was twenty-seven years old back then, and we had a young-adult church, consisting of about five hundred young people, mostly in their twenties. We gathered to cry out in fasting and prayer for the Lord to visit our city.

The Lord did something different: He spoke audibly.

I don't want to tell the story; I tell the story in bunches of places, and I don't want to take the time to tell it now. He spoke the word and said, "I am going to release twenty-four hour prayer in the spirit of the tabernacle of David." Now, that was a strange thought to me. I hadn't thought through this idea.

He said, "I am going to release twenty-four hour prayer." This was back in 1983. I thought, "Twenty-four hour prayer? Why would anyone want to do twenty-four hour prayer?" That was my initial thought. "In the spirit of the tabernacle of David? What is that?" The Lord spoke Psalm 27:4. Again, I'm not going to give the details of it; it's about a ten-to-fifteen minute story, that I've told many times, and we have it on many different tapes, and some of you have heard it.

THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID

King David had a full-time worship ministry in Israel that went twenty-four hours a day. Here at the end of paragraph A, in 1 Chronicles 23, he had 4,000 full-time musicians. Can you imagine 4,000 full-time paid musicians? Some of you said, "Yes, I can imagine it. That's my vision! I can imagine it." He had 4,000 full-time musicians, and he had 288 prophetic singers who were trained. Undoubtedly, he had a whole network for the training of more musicians and more singers. They would come together and they would take sets around the clock. They would minister in worship before the Lord twenty-four hours a day.

This is how the Lord gave us the call to IHOP-KC back in 1983: He used the verse, Psalm 27:4. "This is one thing," David said, "that I do all the days of my life: I gaze on the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4, paraphrased).

TWENTY-FOUR HOUR PRAYER IN THE SPIRIT OF THE TABERNACLE

So, at the end of this experience, this twenty-one day fast, this is one of the major things that God does. We put up a sign in the church; it says, "Twenty-four hour prayer in the spirit of the tabernacle of David." People would come by and they would say, "What is that?" Or people would join our church and they would say, "What is this?"

I would almost always give the same answer: “I don’t know; I really don’t know what it is.”

They said, “Twenty-four hour prayer, what is this?”

I would say, “Truly, I do not know. I’m not being falsely humble; I really don’t know what it is. I just know it’s going to happen one of these days.”

We went for sixteen years with that sign on the wall. We had prayer meetings every day, little prayer meetings with little music in them. We looked up there at that sign and got to the place where we didn’t even notice the sign. The visitors always did, and they would say, “Tell us when that’s going to happen.”

So I didn’t know why, but I knew my main mandate in life was to do twenty-four hour prayer. It was focused on the beauty of God. That was a new idea to me: that we would have prayer, and that it would have a beauty-of-God foundation to it—a focus on God’s beauty. I was focused on prayer to see the power of God, not to encounter the beauty of God.

It seemed like the Lord had given us the wrong verse. “Lord, I know You know the Bible really well. Are You sure that’s the right verse for our twenty-four hour prayer ministry?” I would think, “Pour out the Holy Spirit in power and signs and wonders” would be the verse. Not this.

“SET ME AS A SEAL UPON YOUR HEART”

Then, five years go by. Paragraph B, July 1988. I had my second and only other encounter with the Lord where He gave an audible direction for the ministry. He was speaking about IHOP-KC, but I didn’t know it at the time. I didn’t understand, because I didn’t really know what IHOP was; IHOP was an idea, not a reality.

I didn’t even bother thinking about IHOP until sixteen years later when IHOP—KC started. I was praying in my office one morning and I looked at a wedding card. The wedding card had this verse from Song of Solomon 8:6. It says, “Set me as a seal upon Your heart, as a seal upon Your arm; for love”—God’s love—is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave” (Song 8:6). God’s jealousy is *cruel*, which is *demanding*, is what it means; all-encompassing, as the grave is.

“God’s love is like flames of fire; even the waters of persecution and temptation cannot put this fire out” (Song 8:7, paraphrased). I read that verse on a wedding card or invitation; I thought, “Wow, that’s a great verse.” I was very unfamiliar with the passage. I began to pray, and what happened is, the Holy Spirit began to rest on me. I began to weep. I was turning it into a prayer for Jesus to come and touch my heart.

So, I picked up the phone and told the receptionist, “The Lord is touching me right now in a special way. I don’t want any phone calls, nothing! OK, I’m going to give myself to this.” It was an unusual experience. I knew something strange was happening.

A WORD FROM THE LORD

So, five minutes later or so, the phone rang. It’s amazing how you can go from the heights of ecstasy with God to being mad in one second. Oh, so you guys relate to that? OK.

I picked the phone up and I said, “Yeah, hello.” I was still feeling the weight of the Lord’s presence on me, which is a very rare experience.

The receptionist said, “Bob Jones is on the phone.”

Some of you know that name. Bob Jones is a man who was with us during some of the early years, about the first ten years of our foundational years here in Kansas City. He has a strong prophetic ministry.

My receptionist said, “Bob Jones is on the phone. God has spoken to him audibly and he’s supposed to tell you right now. I didn’t think you would mind if I let God in... I mean, if God has something to say, is that OK?”

I said, “No, good call, good call, absolutely. If someone has the audible voice of the Lord, always get the call through!”

So I was on the phone and I said, “Hello, Bob.”

He said, “I only have one minute, because I’m on my way out of town. All my bags are in the car; I’m ready to go.

“Just moments ago,” he said, “the Lord spoke to me audibly. I heard His thunderous audible voice, awake. He said, ‘Call Mike Bickle, and give him Song of Solomon 8:6-7.’”

I was in my office thinking, “Oh my goodness.” I didn’t even tell Bob I was reading that; I was overcome.

He said, “I have not even looked it up, Mike. I just heard this, and I’m literally running late. The Lord told me this, and I have to tell you right now. The guy is in the car waiting for me. I hope it means something to you. The Lord told me, this is what you’re going to be focused on all the days of your life, and this is an anointing. He’s going to release in the body of Christ worldwide, sovereignly. He’s going to raise up people all over the world who will operate in this anointing.”

Bob Jones says, “I don’t even really know what this is about; I’ve got to go. I’ll check in with you in a couple of days.” Click.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON MANDATE

It’s a ninety-second phone call. I hang up the phone and I’m overwhelmed. I call my wife and I’m so excited.

“Diane, you’re not going to believe this! Bob Jones called and gave me this verse! I was reading it and the Spirit was on me.” In thirty years of ministry, I’ve only ever called the receptionist one time and said, “Don’t let a phone call come in.”

I said, “This is not my normal way! This is awesome! I know my mandate is to do this for the rest of my life!” She was all excited. So, I hung the phone up. Then, for the first time, I read the Song of Solomon. “It’s going to be my mandate.” I said, “Ugh!” I was absolutely depressed.

I came home and she said, “Hey, this is a great day!”

I said, “It’s a horrible day!”

She said, “Why?”

I said, “Have you ever read the Song of Solomon?”

She said, “Oh yeah, I love it! Isn’t it awesome?”

I said, “No, it’s terrible! Terrible! It’s flowers and perfumes and girls!” I said, “I am not interested in this book.”

TWO MANDATES, OR ONE?

I told the Lord, “Lord, my father was a professional boxer.” As an amateur, he was world champion. He traveled around with the Olympics and I was trained in a boxing world with all boxers around, and in the gym. I said, “Lord, I’m the son of a boxer! Give me the life of David, or the book of Romans, or Revelation! I cannot deal with this book.” I said, “Please, give this to the women’s ministry. I really don’t relate to this at all.”

That’s funny, but it was truly troublesome. If the Lord speaks it audibly, your fate is sealed; it’s over. I had no way out of it and no honorable discharge from this mandate—from the Song of Solomon.

Then I began to tell the Lord, “Lord, wait... something is confusing here. The most cherished thing You’ve ever told me in terms of my ministry that I am going to do twenty-four hour prayer. Now you’re telling me Song of Solomon. I can’t have two different mandates!” I thought they were two opposite mandates; I didn’t realize it was the same reality. It took me years to figure out that it was the same calling.

INTERCESSION ENERGIZED BY INTIMACY

That’s why I’m taking time on this story: There are a number of you in this room, undoubtedly, who are called to intercession. You’re approaching it like I did for years: “Intercession is mostly about revival and power!” Intercession is about releasing revival and power and many things like that in terms of God’s whole end-time purpose. But intercession must be founded and connected and energized by encountering intimacy.

I didn’t understand this at all. I loved God, but I said, “I want the power of God! I want revival! Devil, come out or I’m coming in after you!” You know, Rambo Christian. I didn’t think much about the other grid of the kingdom.

So, the Lord spoke this. I began to study the Song of Solomon for a couple of years—out of sheer, not obedience, yes, but different than obedience. It was inevitable; God is state-champion wrestler. He’s going to win every time and pin you, and you yield. I said, “There is no way I will get out of this; I might as well give into it.”

So, it wasn’t mostly obedience, it was mostly knowledge of the inevitability of the fact that if God called it, it’s going to happen. So I began to study it and it began to move my heart after a couple of years. I began to say, “Lord, this is really good.”

This was 1988, and we didn’t start IHOP-KC until 1999. I didn’t even connect it to the IHOP reality. I thought, “I have two mandates.” My friends would say, “What is it? Is it this prayer thing, or is it the Song of Solomon?”

I would say, “I don’t know; I can’t figure it out. It seems like two different directions.”

RELEASING THE FIRE OF LOVE

Now, I have a little of the teaching on what this verse means here on the handout. The prayer is, we’re asking Jesus to set His hand, His grace, to set a seal of fire on our hearts. That’s what we’re really asking: “Lord, release fire, release the love of God into our spirits! Release the flame of God that cannot be put out!”

Water always puts out fire, unless it is God’s fire. Then, water cannot even put it out. Water is always stronger than fire. There is a supernatural impartation of love to the Body of Christ worldwide. This is going to be released worldwide, this anointing to experience God at the heart level. Even persecution and temptation cannot put this flame out. I’m sure this is what the Holy Spirit is going to do in this generation.

ABRAHAM’S EXCEEDING GREAT REWARD

Paragraph C. God gave Abraham many great promises of great things. Look at it: In Genesis 12, God said to Abraham, “Get out of your country to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and I will make your name great.”

Look, there are many dimensions to this promise—a great nation and a great name. “You’re going to be a man by whom, then, all the families of the earth will get blessed.” I mean, I don’t know how you get a greater promise than this in terms of impact; in terms of ministry.

It’s a couple of chapters later in Genesis 15:1. The Lord spoke to Abraham; the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, and it says, “Do not be afraid; I am your shield and your exceeding great reward.”

Abraham might have said, “Wait a second, Lord. My reward is that I’m going to have a great name and be a great nation and touch all the nations. My ministry will touch all the nations.”

The Lord would say to Abraham, in essence, “No, Abraham. That is your secondary reward. I, Myself, am your primary reward. I am your exceeding great reward.”

Many of us have received promises from the Lord in various ways: some, through impressions in our hearts; others, more dramatically, where God has promised a breakthrough of His power or His goodness, in money, in relationships, in healing, in ministry. There are many different ways to categorize how God has promised things to each of our hearts.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY PROMISES

I want to say this: It is critical that we really buy into this. Those promises of ministry, of impact, of healing, of restoration, of anointing, of revelation, all of these are secondary promises to the primary promise that God Himself would unveil Himself to your heart as your primary great reward.

When our secondary promises become our primary promise, we almost always get injured and burnt out and really bruised in the process. I wouldn’t say *almost*, I would say we always get burnt out in the process.

The process of waiting for the circumstances to be blessed is a really difficult journey between getting the promise and the promise being manifest. Often it takes years and all kinds of surprises. People treat us wrongly

and do things wrongly; expectations don't happen in the way we think. Our hearts get wounded and hurt and tweaked and twisted; all kinds of negative things happen. There is only one possible way to carry our hearts while we're waiting for the promises in any manner of manifestations of promise. That is, that we're encountering the Lord as our primary purpose throughout the journey.

THE OIL OF INTIMACY

Page two. The revelation of Jesus as a Bridegroom God. The oil of intimacy. Matthew 25.

This is right before Jesus went to the cross. His public ministry is over; He's talking to His disciples in private now. He says a very key word in verse 1. He says, "Then"—what is then? In its context, it's Matthew 24. Matthew 24 and 25 is one teaching; Matthew 24, as many of you know, is the grand teaching of Jesus on the end-times. He's in the same flow; just forget the chapter divisions. He's in the same conversation. He's talking about the end-times, the second coming, the Great Tribulation, signs and wonders, power.

"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet" —to encounter—"the bridegroom" (Mt. 25:1).

There is coming a time, Jesus was saying, where the kingdom of God would be like people encountering a bridegroom. Though it's been true throughout history that a few have encountered Jesus as a bridegroom, in the generation the Lord returns, the whole Body of Christ is going to encounter Jesus as a bridegroom. It's the only time in history, in the final generation, that it's going to happen—in the generation that He returns.

"Those who were foolish took their lamps, but took no oil with them" (Mt. 25:3). Most of us are really familiar with this parable. In verse 4, the wise people took oil in their lamps. The oil speaks of intimacy, heart encounter.

GO BUY OIL BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

Verse 5. "The Bridegroom was delayed." The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil' (v. 8).

Here's one of the really negative statements of this parable: Our lamps are going out. Our heart, our ministry, the lamp, the light of God is going out in our hearts and in our ministries, because of the turbulence of the end-times. If we don't have intimacy, our lamps will go out. You can think of lamps in terms of our ministries; you can think of it in terms of our personal relationship with the Lord.

It won't be sufficient to have the business-as-usual relationship with the Lord that the church in the West is so familiar with today, where you have Jesus on the run, even though your friends say you're really on fire for God. Jesus on the run—it's more about getting more power, more money, and more honor; where we endure prayer meetings so we finally get power to have fun meetings.

There is more to God than this. Obviously you know that. The kingdom of God is going to be like people encountering a bridegroom. The wise people in that generation will have oil in their lamps. The unwise aren't believers; they're ministries. They're virgins with lamps with ministries. They're foolish because they pursued their ministries more than they pursued heart-encounter with the Lord. They had no oil in their ministries; their lamps were going out.

THE BRIDAL PARADIGM

Paragraph A. The kingdom of God is likened to people who encounter Jesus as a bridegroom. We refer much, in our IHOP—KC world here, to what we call the “bridal paradigm.” You can use any term you want: “The bridal paradigm of the kingdom.” We say that all the time, our teachers in our Bible school, talking about, “Well, the bridal paradigm of the kingdom says...” or, “Because of that...” and then they’ll teach their point.

The word *paradigm* means *perspective* or *point-of-view*. So, when we talk about the bridal paradigm, we’re talking about the bridal perspective of the kingdom of God. We are to see the kingdom—I’m talking about the end-time Church as the *we*—we are to see the kingdom worldwide, the Body of Christ in all the nations, through the eyes of a wholehearted bride with devoted love.

THE DARKEST, GREATEST HOUR IN ALL HISTORY

The only way we’ll make sense of what’s going on in the generation the Lord returns, with all the great outpouring of power—there’s a great outpouring of power the Bible prophesies in the generation the Lord returns; tremendous power and a tremendous harvest.

Probably, in some of the sessions we’ll cover that. It’s a strong biblical hope. The greatest hour of the Church is yet ahead of us, beyond the book of Acts. The greatest difficulty in history is yet ahead of us as well: It’s called “the Great Tribulation.” The Church will be here during the Great Tribulation as God’s messengers and as God’s ambassadors, releasing God’s power to the nations.

THE FALSE DOCTRINE OF THE PRETRIBULATION RAPTURE

What I’m going to talk about next, is sincere; it’s very sincere, but dangerous and damaging. One of the most significant deceptions today in the Body of Christ is the pre-tribulation rapture: the idea that we’re going to be gone any minute, and out of here before things become troublesome.

There are many who teach that. It’s sincere; it’s absolutely non-biblical. It’s more than non-biblical, it’s a significant deception. Many of the people who teach it are teaching it because they grew up with it in what their denomination taught them. They’ve heard it since they were five years old, and they just go with it; they’ve never thought any differently.

I want to say clearly, and I want to say nicely: It is clearly not a biblical doctrine. The rapture is, but not the pre-tribulation rapture. The Church will be here, and it will be the Church’s greatest hour. We will be operating in power in the nations. The greatest revival in history is yet ahead of us.

THE CHURCH IS IN THE SEAT OF MOSES

It’s likened to Moses, being in the wilderness. The Lord said to Moses, “OK, I’m going to go shake up the kingdom of Egypt.”

Moses said, “Oh, I don’t want to go. Lord, would You take me home now?” But Moses was trained to go shake up the kingdom of Egypt and Pharaoh, to release the plagues and judgments and deliver the people.

The Church is in the Moses position, in the Great Tribulation, of releasing the judgments of God. The judgments of God in the book of Revelation are not judgments on the Church; they are judgments released through the Church on the Antichrist system.

The judgments of the book of Revelation are being released by the prayer movement. The prayer movement isn't coming under them, any more than Moses came under the judgments when he stretched forth his rod.

It's critical now that the prayer movement would be matured. It stops and starts the judgments. Someone says, "Does prayer stop judgment, or start it?" The answer is both. Moses stretched forth his rod and the ten plagues of Egypt happened. He stretched forth his rod and prayed and they stopped. They stopped and started at his word, under the Father's authority. He was a picture of the end-time Church in the greatest hour of history.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING THE TIMES

The reason why it's such a significant deception, the idea of being taken out of here, is because people don't need to study the end-times because it doesn't matter to them. They're not going to be here anyway!

There are over a hundred chapters, a hundred chapters in the Bible of which the primary focus is the end-times. A hundred chapters in the Bible! Do you know how many chapters there are in the four gospels, if you add them up together? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—eighty-nine.

There is more information in the Bible about Jesus coming back in power to rule the earth, than there is information in the Bible about Jesus coming in power the first time to accomplish redemption. It's the same Jesus, the same power, the same Holy Spirit, the same Bible. Most of the Church is completely illiterate of those other chapters. Why? They don't think they're going to be here anyway. It doesn't matter.

DON'T STUDY CHARTS; STUDY JESUS

When I encourage people to study the end times, I say, "Don't study the end times to get your charts right. It's nice to get a sense of timing and some of the sequence of what's happening. But you study the end times because you are in love with the Man whom the end times are talking about."

The end times are about a man taking over the world. It's not about exotic events on charts; it's about a man, the same Man in all four gospels. In the four gospels, His power was released on the way to accomplishing redemption; in the end-times chapters, it's the same Jesus, but His power is released in order to take over the world and establish His kingdom on earth.

The reason the Church doesn't think much or care much about those hundred chapters is, they think they're going to be gone. It's a huge tragedy, the state of the Church worldwide being nearly illiterate about end-time prophecy—almost completely illiterate. It doesn't matter to them because they think they're going to be gone.

THE CHURCH IS NOT PREPARING FOR ITS GREATEST CONFLICT

I'm on a bunny trail right now, but I'm really enjoying myself. The second reason it's such an important, significant deception, is that the Church isn't preparing for its greatest conflict.

It's like the guy who's getting ready to go to war when he's in boot camp. He's doing drills and exercising, training his body and their mind, and he's flowing together. He's going to war. Most of the Church is in vacation mode, and the greatest conflict in history is around the corner. The Church is addicted to entertainment and recreation and comfort. The greatest trouble in history, and the greatest revival, is around the corner. But they think they're going to be gone. There are horrible, horrible consequences to the people's hearts when they believe they're going to be gone.

LOVESICK PEOPLE WHO WILL NOT DRAW BACK IN FEAR

I say that; I truly mean to say that tenderly. I know that when you're raised in a denomination, you've been taught it your whole life, and it seems equal to the Word of God, but it's not. Back to the notes here, it is only the Bridegroom reality that is going to prepare the Church. It's lovesick people who will not draw back in fear. It's people who are experiencing the reward on the inside, even if they end up in a prison on the outside.

Their hearts are alive. They are experiencing. Paul, in Acts 16, is in prison. They've got his body in prison; he's singing and worshipping, he and Silas. They are lovesick. "Oh, we love You, God! We're not mad, we're not saying, 'How did we end up in prison?' We love You; You are our all."

Of course, the earthquake hits; the prison opens. Paul says, "Oh, OK, let's go." Paul was going into Philippi to lead a worship meeting anyway, to go and publicly preach Jesus, and get them to worship God. He says, "Well, they've got us in prison; let's go ahead and have the worship set. Let's do it right here! We love You, God, we are Yours."

The reason Paul can do that in Acts 16 is because Jesus was His primary reward, not His outward ministry and circumstances. Though our outward ministry and our circumstances are a part of our reward, they're secondary. I didn't say they're our tenth, they're secondary. They're very important. Some people in our midst go the other direction and throw away all our promises. I say, "No, we need to contend for our promises! We need to fight and be in prayer for them. We just want them to be second; not first and not tenth, just second. Don't exaggerate it either way."

THE CALL TO ACTIVE INTIMACY WITH GOD

Paragraph B. The Bridegroom message is the call to active intimacy with God. This is one of my favorite passages here. 1 Corinthians 2: "The Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God's heart."

Why does the Holy Spirit search the deep things of God's heart? So that you and I could experience them; to *know*, in the New Testament language. Often, the phrase *to know* means *to experience*, is the idea. The Holy Spirit discerns the deep things of the Father's heart to tell you and me about the deep things of His heart. Beloved, I cannot think of anything more valuable than this, than the Holy Spirit, and this is a ministry the Holy Spirit will have for us forever. A million years from now, He will still be doing this in your life. He will still be telling you what is going on in the deep places of the Father's heart.

THE CALL TO EXPERIENCE THE PULSE OF GOD'S HEART

Paragraph C. The bridal message speaks of God's invitation to experience this. When we talk about the bridal paradigm and the bridal message, it's experiencing the deep things of His emotions. Look at Ephesians 3: Paul prays "that you would be able to comprehend... the width and length and depth and height" —to be able to experience God's affections and emotions (Eph. 3:18).

God wants us to comprehend and experience His affections; His burnings emotions, His desire for us. Beloved, when we feel a little of His desires, it changes the way we approach prayer. It changes the way we approach perseverance and difficulty. Many things are different when we have a little understanding and a little experience of His emotions; when we comprehend and experience them.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE SONS OF GOD

Paragraph D. As sons of God, we are in a position to experience God's throne—in other words, His power and authority.

We are all sons of God, men and women. As the Bride of Christ, we are in a position to experience His heart. As sons, we experience His throne, His power; as the Bride, we experience His heart, His emotions. These are two descriptive titles in the Bible that describe our relationship to the Father. Both of these identities transcend gender.

MEN AND WOMEN AS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

Paragraph E. In the same way that women are sons of God, so men are the Bride of Christ. It's bigger than gender. It's not talking about being male and female, it's a position of privilege; it's a position in our inheritance.

Most women that I know in the Body of Christ understand the message of the sons of God and power. They don't struggle with being sons of God, because they don't see it as a call to be less feminine. They see it as a call to experience God's power, His throne. The sons inherit the throne. However, men really struggle with the "Bride of Christ" message. They automatically conclude, in a wrong way, that it's a call to be less masculine. The women get it right, but the men are confused.

I heard someone say, "That's the story of history!" I heard that; I heard that. Just having fun.

THE REALITY OF BRIDAL LOVE IN HISTORY

Paragraph F. Some of the greatest men of God in history experienced the reality of the bridal identity and the bridal relationship, even though they didn't use the word *bride*. John the Baptist and John the apostle used the word *bride*.

With King David, it was the same experience. Here is the great warrior-king of Israel. I mean, we're talking about the man's man—the greatest warrior in Israel's history, but he was a lovesick worshipper, gazing on God's beauty. He was lovesick; he was fascinated with God's beauty and God's tenderness and God's emotion. There is more about God's emotion revealed through David than through any other person in the Old Testament. That's the premise of the book I wrote, *After God's Own Heart*. David was the person God chose to reveal His emotions to the planet. David wrote them in Psalms. He was a student of God's emotions, which is the bridal reality—to experience God's heart.

SONS OF THUNDER, BRIDE OF CHRIST

John the apostle was the "Son of Thunder." That's what Jesus called him. He was called a son of thunder in the natural because of his personality. He was a thunderous guy.

I did a study once, a couple of weeks teaching on the personality of John. I don't want to go into it right now, but my point is, John was a fiery dude. He was a troublesome guy. He was the one who said, in Luke 9, "Jesus, they won't join our group. Can we call fire down on them from heaven and burn them?"

Jesus came back from the city in Samaria, and John said, "How did it go?"

“Well, they didn’t show up, they didn’t come.”

“Can we burn them? Can we nuke them? Can we blow the city up?”

Jesus said, “Well, John, no.” He says, “Yeah, John, you can send fire on them” —again, I’m making up this conversation—“however, it won’t be until Acts 8”—when John and Peter went to Samaria and called the fire of the Spirit down on that city. They did call fire down, but in the right way, a couple of years later. Anyway, Jesus looked at him and said, “You and your brother are sons of thunder.” That wasn’t entirely positive. It had a promise in it; the name had a redemptive promise, but they had to get there first.

THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED

We’re talking about this rough, tough guy. But when he writes the gospel of John in the nineties, is what most scholars think, at the end of his life, he describes himself five times as the one who laid his head on the Lord’s breast and the one whom God loved. His identity was so changed. He was thunderous in the natural, and over decades he became thunderous in his spirit before God in love.

He didn’t say, “And John did this...” He said, “The disciple whom God loved ran.” Here’s a little side thing: in John 21, he says, “Peter and the disciple whom the Lord loved ran” —I like that, but this is funny—“the disciple whom the Lord loved got there first.” There are still issues! He and Peter are ninety years old. Peter has been with the Lord for ninety years, and John gets that little point in: “I outran him!”

“John, you’re ninety, no one cares.”

“I know, but I outran him! I know Peter’s going to read this. I outran him, we were eighteen years old!”

I read that and I said, “There are still issues in this guy! He’s still all boy, even as a mature man.”

THE CALL TO HEAR HIS HEARTBEAT

Jesus called John the Baptist the greatest man ever born of a woman. John spoke in John 3:29 and said, “I heard the voice of Jesus as the Bridegroom. I have heard His voice, and my heart is ravished with joy. It is filled with joy” (Jn. 3:29, paraphrased).

So I tell the men, “Experiencing the reality of being the bride doesn’t undermine your masculinity. It will establish it and strengthen it. You don’t need to be afraid of what these fiery men encountered in God, anymore than the women need to be afraid of being sons of God. It’s the calling to experience His heart and to lay your head upon His breast, to hear His heartbeat.”

THE TENDER MERCIES OF JESUS

Top of page 3. What is the bridegroom message? I’m going to go through this really briefly, A and B. In the book I talked about, *After God’s Own Heart*, I spend a chapter or two breaking down these points. It’s the idea, paragraph A, second sentence, that Jesus is filled with tender mercy. It’s the mercy of God that is part of the bridegroom message. Jesus is gentle when He deals with our weaknesses. Jesus is gentle with us; He really is, in our weaknesses, if we repent. He is gentle with us.

Some people confuse rebellion and immaturity. That's one of the great confusions in the body of Christ today, in holiness camps: The person who's rebellious, and the person who's immature, sometimes do the same outward activity. The rebellious person has no regard for God, or for obeying God, even if he or she names the name of Jesus. He's trying to get away from sin. The immature person is trying to get free from sin. He stills get caught in the sin, but he's trying to get free from it. His heart is to please the Lord.

The difference between King Saul and King David is that Saul was repentant when he got caught; David repented because he offended God. David said, "God, You are troubled, therefore I am troubled. Regardless of who catches me, You are troubled, therefore I am troubled." That is sincerity. King Saul only repented when he was caught and trapped in a corner. His repentance wasn't real.

God is tender towards sincere and immature believers. When we understand the bridal message, people will run; believers will run to Him instead of from Him when they know He is gentle with them when they fail. The devil doesn't want us to get established in this, because the devil wants us to run from God when we fail; not to Him with an open spirit.

JESUS, GLADDER THAN HIS FELLOWS

Paragraph B. The next dimension of God's emotions in the bridal message is His gladness. Jesus has more gladness than any other man in history. In Hebrews 1:9 it says that He had the anointing of gladness more than any of His companions—meaning any of His human companions. "Any other man," is what it's talking about. It didn't mean He was just the gladdest among the twelve He was hanging out with; He is the gladdest Man among all the companions of the human race.

Most of Church history has viewed God as mostly mad or mostly sad when He relates to us; like we come before God, and God is either angry, or maybe He's not angry but He's so disappointed when you come and ask Him something. "Oh, it's you again! It's Bickle again, what do you want? I forgive you so much, what else do you want?"

"Well, I would like you to help me break through in this..."

"I am so sad at the way you live. I am so heartbroken over you all the time."

"Well, if you answer this one more prayer, I promise I will never do it again." We get these crazy religious equations when the image of God that we have is that He's mostly mad or mostly sad when He relates to us.

THE BURNING HEART OF GOD

Beloved, He's mostly glad with His people who are sincere. For 99.9999 percent of the time, because we have billions of years, He is glad with His people. Even on the earth, He loves us even in our weakness. He actually enjoys us, even while we're growing up. He doesn't just enjoy us once we're fully mature; He enjoys us each step of the process. Each step of the way, He enjoys us. When you understand that there's a glad God you're relating to, which many of you do, though for some of you, this is a new point, it really changes the way you process your failure and weakness before Him.

Then the bridegroom dimension talks about His fiery affections; His burning desire for us. It talks about His beauty, and there are a number of other subjects that I address in the book *After God's Own Heart* about God's

emotions. When we become students of God's emotions, it stirs our emotions. When we understand God's emotions, it stirs our emotions and it forms us and awakens our emotions.

LOSING PERSPECTIVE ON BLESSINGS

Paragraph D. We can lose perspective when we're more focused on our secondary blessings than we are on the primary encounter with the Lord. We can lose our way. We lose the oil of intimacy and our heart gets wounded; we get wounded and we get burnt out.

Some of our wounds today and some of our disappointments are signposts that our secondary rewards have become first place in our life. Most of the believers that I've known over the thirty years of ministry—most, I'm not saying ninety percent, but over fifty percent—most believers in the Body of Christ are living with wounds and disappointments in their relationship with God. One of the reasons they're so wounded and disappointed—and they call it *burnt out*; there's bitterness; there are strands of bitterness—is because the thing they wanted most was for the circumstances to be blessed and to work right.

God wanted the thing that they would want most to be encountering Him. Their secondary promises from God about the ministry working, the business working, the relationship working, that's what they wanted most. Beloved, when we live that way, our hearts are going to get bruised, really badly.

MIKE'S ULTIMATE DREAM

The Lord wants us to care about our secondary blessings. It's right that I care about my ministry and how it's going, but when I care about my ministry, about IHOP-KC and all that I'm doing more than my heart before God, IHOP-KC is going to bruise and burn me out really badly. The reason I can walk through IHOP-KC without quitting, even though it's the hardest thing I've ever done, is because I've got a reward going on, on the inside, when the difficulty is going on in the outside. If IHOP-KC was mostly what I was about, I would be in very difficult shape. I am mostly about Jesus.

I tell people, IHOP-KC is the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. It is far harder than pastoring. If I had to do it over again, I would do it over again, but I didn't know there would be so much trouble, and so much conflict and tension; it's unrelenting. It's a child that needs to be fed all day, every day; in twenty different ways it needs to be fed. I talk to friends outside of IHOP-KC and say, "It has an unforgiving schedule; it's always an unforgiving schedule. It needs money and it needs systems to work. It needs people not to be mad at each other and attacking each other." There are many things that have to be in place for this thing to work.

I've had friends come through and say, "Boy, this must be your dream." They saw the sign that said, "Twenty-four hour prayer," for sixteen years.

I say, "No, IHOP-KC isn't my dream. It never has been and never will be. It is my assignment. My dream is to experience God in my heart. That is my dream. I get to do my dream in spite of IHOP-KC."

I mean that. I'm talking about the leadership. "Sitting at IHOP-KC, that's how I get to touch my dream? I'm leading IHOP-KC?" I say, "No, if I didn't have my dream that I could feel Him and touch Him and know Him, I could never bear up under the wearisomeness of leading this."

One guy came and said, “I want to start an IHOP!” The guy had a huge ministry, and thousands of people in his church. “I want to stop that and start an IHOP.”

I said, “Don’t.”

He said, “Don’t?”

“Don’t.”

“I thought you would be the one guy talking me into it.”

“Only at gunpoint! Only if God put a gun to your head and said, ‘IHOP or nothing,’ should you do it. That’s what He did to me.”

I’ve done this for seven years, and you don’t want to do it, except at gunpoint. Truly! It’s a great advertisement; it looks great on the poster. It’s a really hard lifestyle. I realize, I just emptied our information meeting coming up at 12:15. That’s OK, because I say this to them in the information meeting. We cannot do this because it’s novel and romantic. We have to do this because it’s real and we’re hungry at the heart level.

So the reason I can do IHOP-KC is because it’s not my dream. It never has been, never will be. My dream is to experience Him more greatly in my heart. That’s my dream forever and ever, and that’s the dream of the majority of you in this room.

THE MERCIFUL SIGNPOSTS OF PAIN

Paragraph E. So, when you see your pain, let the pain be a signpost that says to you, “Make Jesus your primary reward.”

Now, some of you in the room, many of you will still have pain, even if Jesus is your primary reward. A whole separate department of pain in our life is because He’s not our primary reward; our blessing is our primary reward. The money isn’t coming in the way they said they would give it to us; we’re mad. The money is bigger to us than encountering the Lord. The honors they promised, they’re not giving us the honor they said they would give when we all signed the paper. Your honor is bigger than your encounter with the Lord; your promises are bigger than your intimacy, in terms of your focus.

Beloved, that will burn you out and bruise you for sure. People live that way; millions live that way in the Body of Christ. They have a strong argument for why everyone treated them wrongly. At the end of the day, people couldn’t get to them unless their hearts were focused on the secondary things as their primary thing in life. People cannot touch me nearly so easily if my heart isn’t into the thing they’re touching. My heart isn’t focused on it—no one does this perfectly—meaning, even when I’m focused on the Lord in a right way, I have times where my secondary focuses become primary.

The pain comes. I say, “Oh, yes, I did it again. I did the thing I tell them not to do. I did it again.” So even the pain is a gift of God to realign us. “Mike, it was never about how many people and money and honor; it was about you and Me.”

“Oh, that’s right.”

“You’re hurting over the people, the money, the honor, the things working right. That’s not what it’s about; it’s about you and Me.”

“Oh, I forgot. I know I taught that last night, but I forgot. Thank You!” I get realigned. It’s not like the pain goes away instantly, but it’s far more manageable in the grace of God when our focus is right. The pain is an actual gift of God.

“SHOCK ME NOW, DON’T SHOCK ME THEN”

At the judgment seat of Christ, when God evaluates our lives, we only have the truth of what we actually did. The Lord is using pain so that we do things right now, instead of then. I tell the Lord—it’s a little prayer I have at the end of paragraph E—“Lord, shock me now, don’t shock me then.” I say, “Tell me now if I’m not aligned right. Don’t wait until I stand before You and then say, ‘Oh, Mike, by the way... those years on the earth, you weren’t aligned right with Me.’”

“You’re kidding! All the time I thought I was.”

“Yeah, I tried to tell you. All the time, you weren’t listening. You listened to what everyone else said about how awesome you were. You didn’t listen to your critics, you only listened to your cheerleaders. The truth is, you weren’t aligned right.”

“Oh, no! Can I have another chance?”

“No, it’s over, Mike.”

I don’t want to be shocked then; I want Him to shock me now. If He has to wake me up with pain, I want to be woken up now. Now I can make decisions that matter for that day. I’m not telling people that if you live with Jesus as your primary reward, there won’t be pain. There will still be pain in your life, and there will still be disappointments, but they’re significantly more manageable. You have a different perspective; you have a greater sense of connectedness with God that is more important to you than the money and the honor and feeling good and things going right.

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE

Paragraph F. The end-time Church is going to be in deep unity with the Holy Spirit. We’re going to be saying and doing what the Holy Spirit is saying and doing. Only one time in history is that going to happen—just before the Lord returns. I think it’s in those years—maybe even in a decade or two, it’s hard to know—it’s in those years right before the coming of the Lord. I believe that there are people alive on the earth today who will see the coming of the Lord. I’ve told people we may be five years out or fifty years out before the whole grand events begin to take place. I think we’re closer to fifty than five, but then, no one in heaven is asking my opinion.

THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE SAY “COME!”

I think we’re some decades out, in my personal opinion, but I assure you of this: When Jesus returns, the Church worldwide will be in intercession, saying, “Come, Jesus, come!” The whole Church will be praying in a

bridal identity. The entire Church will have a bridal identity, crying out, “Come!”

Paragraph G. This is what this prophecy of Revelation 22:17 says; it describes the Church functioning in four ways. We’re going to be anointed with the Spirit. The Spirit is going to be on us, speaking through us. We are going to be engaged in intercession, crying, “Come!” We are going to be established in our bridal identity. We are going to be saying, “Come!” as a cherished bride.

We’re going to be effective in the harvest, because if you read Revelation 22:17, first we say “Come!” to the Lord—that’s prayer and worship. Then we say, “Come!” to the world, “Come to Jesus the Bridegroom-God!” We’re effectively in the harvest. That’s one of the most significant prophecies in the entire Bible for the end times. There are so many dimensions in that one sentence.

THE REVELATION OF GOD’S DELIGHT

Top of page four. The revelation of God’s delight.

I’m going to tell you about another experience. “How many experiences have you had?” Well, I gave them all to you, right here in one message. So, there, I nearly gave them all to you. Almost, but not quite.

In November, 1995, I had a prophetic dream one Sunday morning. I woke up out of it, which is when the presence of the Spirit was on me. In the dream, I was standing on a stage. An audible voice of God spoke. God spoke. I assume it was the Holy Spirit speaking.

He said, “Tell the people, call them ‘Hephzibah. Hephzibah!’”

So I was saying, “Hephzibah... Hephzibah...”

I woke up out of this with the presence of the Spirit on me; I was very, very aware that it was a divine encounter. I said, “Hephzibah. I know that verse!”

Now the interesting thing is, if you look in Isaiah 62:4, it says, “You shall no longer be termed *forsaken*... but you shall be called *Hephzibah*”—here’s what it means—“The Lord delights in you” (Is. 62:4)

“For as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride”—in the same way, God rejoices over His people (Is. 62:5b). Did you know that God rejoices over you like a bridegroom rejoices over a bride on His wedding day? The bridegroom is so excited, saying, “Oh, she is the joy of my heart!”

The Holy Spirit says, “God feels the joy of rejoicing.” Instead of the word *rejoicing*, put the word *joy*, *enjoyment*. God enjoys you. He loves your fellowship; He loves partnership with you. God isn’t mad that He made you and then you were saved; He’s excited about who you are.

We may not be excited about who we are, but God is excited about who we are.

WATCHMEN ON THE WALLS

Then, in the next verse, verse 6, it says, “I have set watchmen on your walls, who will never be quiet. They will never hold their peace” (Is. 62:6, paraphrased)—which means, “never be silent.” Night and day, day and night,

night and day, day and night, they will never be silent. The Scripture says, “Give God no rest, night and day, day and night” (Is. 62:7, paraphrased). Now, in thirty years of ministry, I’m guessing that’s the verse I’ve used most, that I’ve referred to, very possibly, more than any other verse. Isaiah 62:6.

SEARCHING FOR “HEPHZIBAH”

The Lord spoke this when He called me in May 1979. He gave me this verse. He says, “I have called you, and your primary ministry is intercession.” I told you last night, I had never been to an intercessory prayer meeting. I didn’t have a clue what was going on. So I began to preach that. When I was pastoring in St. Louis, I was there for seven years. The very first meeting in Kansas City, we started the new church here, that I was pastoring for nearly eighteen years.

The first Sunday, I taught them from Isaiah 62:6. I said, “This is the most important verse of my life.” I taught it many, many times. There’s a reason I’m making this point: I’m not just telling a story about me; I’m making a very important point. I will tie it back together in a second.

So I woke up from this dream. “I know I always read Isaiah 62, starting in verse 6. I’ve referred to Isaiah 62 more than any chapter in the Bible, maybe. I always start in verse 6. I mean, my Bible is worn out just by touching it.” So, I woke up that Sunday morning and said, “Oh man, I feel the presence of the Lord in that unusual way.” Maybe you feel it a time or two in your whole life. “Oh, this is awesome!” I said, “Where is that verse? Hephzibah—I’ve seen it...” I said, “I know it’s in the prophets.”

I said, “Isaiah...” I did it really fast; I had my Bible marked up. I said, “One, two, three, four, five, six, seven... thirty-one, thirty-two, thirty-three... forty-five, forty-six... fifty, fifty-one, sixty, sixty-one...”

When I got to sixty-two, because I knew Isaiah 62 so well, I flipped over it without reading it. “Sixty-three, sixty-four, sixty-five... Jeremiah one, two, three, four, five... Ezekiel one, two, three, four, five... Daniel one, two, three, four, five... Hosea, Joel, Micah, Nahum...” all the way to Malachi.

It took me an hour. I said, “This is impossible!” I said, “I’ve got it clearly marked, all the key verses. Surely, I would have gotten that.”

FINDING “HEPHZIBAH” AT LAST

It took an hour, and I had Sunday morning coming up in a few hours. “OK, let’s do it again.” You know, if the first time failed, try it again. “Isaiah one, two, three, four... thirty-four, thirty-five, thirty-six... sixty, sixty-one, sixty-two...” I turned the page over. “I know Isaiah 62...” That’s the reason it was my favorite chapter. “Of any chapter I know, it’s Isaiah 62.”

“Jeremiah, Daniel one, two, three, four, five... Hosea, Malachi.” It took another hour. I was really frustrated. It was getting close to Sunday service; it was probably seven o’clock in the morning. I woke up early, and I had a couple of hours to get there. I was thinking, “Oh man...” We have two services, starting at eight o’clock. “I’m not getting anything, I had better get something! I have nothing in my mind ready.”

So, I did what a man hates to do; I broke down. The concordance—a moral defeat—the concordance. My wife just goes to the concordance every time. I say, “This is a moral defeat.” I’m really frustrated. I look up in the concordance, *Hephzibah*. It’s only mentioned one time in the Bible. “There, I’ve got it, there it is. Isaiah 62, that

cannot be true! The concordance is wrong! There's no way it's in Isaiah 62, that I'm sure of. The concordance, how could it be wrong on the one word I needed?!"

Ladies, tell the lady next to you, "He is all man; he is all man." OK, that's over now. So I turn to Isaiah 62:4, just in case. It says the verse—verses 4 and 5 is right before verse 6. I said, "Ack! This isn't possible!"

THE UNION OF THE WATCHMEN WITH HEPHZIBAH

Here's what I understand, and here's how I am ending this. I tried to do the perseverance of verse 6, the nightness and dayness of it, not literally night and day, but hours a day for years. I called people to hours a day of perseverance for years. Different people, different callings, but I preached on verse 6, on perseverance, on doing it with our whole heart, for hours, for years; for hours, for years. I hit the watchmen calling and I never had the *Hephzibah* message in it.

This was 1995; IHOP-KC didn't start until 1999. For the first time, I understood that the call to night-and-day prayer and the call to the Song of Solomon is the same calling. There's no way that intercessors can sustain intercession (v. 6) if they're not encountering God in verses 4 and 5.

Right now, across the body of Christ, in the intercessory movement worldwide, though they're excited about power, they're tired and burnt out. The waiting time for the breakthrough is too long, and they're not experiencing God at the heart level. The only promise they have is the promise of revival, or similar promises. They don't have anything to feed them while they're waiting for the external promises to happen.

A FINAL EXHORTATION

The Lord has been saying all along, "There is a greater promise inside of you right now, to touch your heart. I will keep you alive in intercession all the way through, if you will do the *Hephzibah* message before you take on the watchman message of the night-and-dayness of your calling."

As I look around the Body of Christ, most intercessors I know are on the borderline verge of burnt-out. "It's taking so many years for God to visit our area! We've been doing it for years and years, and we're tired." They're not connecting at the verses-4-and-5 level with the *Hephzibah* message; they're only taking on the night-and-day rigors of staying faithful in the prayer room.

The Lord wants to reverse that. In the generation the Lord returns, it's not people crying, "Come!" it's people in a bridal identity crying, "Come!" night and day. Beloved, it's with a bridal identity. That's the only way we will stay with it.

Amen. Let's end with that. Let's stand.