

# More Than A Gift

Connect Group Guide - 8.16.26

## Opening Prayer

## Key Scripture

- Genesis 2:24
- Matthew 1:18–19
- John 14:2
- Ephesians 5:25, 32
- Revelation 19:7

## Message Recap

This message explores the spiritual significance of marriage as a picture of Christ's relationship with the church, and connects that imagery to the purpose of spiritual gifts. The central theme is that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not given for personal benefit—they are given so that we can serve, strengthen, and prepare the bride of Christ, which is the church.

## Key Takeaways

- Marriage was God's idea from the beginning, not a cultural invention, and it reflects His covenant love for His people.
- Satan attacks marriage because it is one of the clearest earthly pictures of God's character, covenant, and purposes.
- The ancient Jewish betrothal process mirrors the relationship between Christ and the church: He has made a covenant, gone to prepare a place, and is coming again for His bride.
- Spiritual gifts are not given for personal use or personal advancement -- they exist to build up the bride of Christ.
- Every believer has a responsibility to serve the church, not just attend it.

# Discussion Questions

## Opening Questions

1. Think about a time when someone trusted you with something that was deeply important to them. How did that responsibility feel? Did it change how you acted?

## Understanding the Text

2. Genesis 2:24 describes a man leaving his father and mother to bond with his wife. Why do you think leaving and cleaving is described as the foundation of marriage? What does that kind of commitment communicate about God's design?
3. Ephesians 5:32 calls the marriage relationship a profound mystery pointing to Christ and the church. In what ways does a healthy marriage reflect the relationship between Jesus and His people? What does an unhealthy marriage communicate by contrast?
4. Pastor Mike described the ancient Jewish betrothal process—the covenant, the waiting period, and the coming celebration. How does that imagery change the way you think about where we are right now as the church?

## Connecting to the Message's Central Idea

5. Pastor Mike said: "When God gives me and you a spiritual gift, it's not for me, it's for his bride. It's not how can my gift help prepare and strengthen me, it's how can my gift strengthen the bride for the coming groom." How does this reframe the way you have thought about spiritual gifts in the past?
6. Pastor Mike described Jesus' bride as "one of the most malnourished brides in America today." Do you agree with that assessment? What does a malnourished church look like in practice, and what does a healthy, well-prepared bride look like?
7. Pastor Mike used a personal illustration about leaving resources with trusted friends to care for his wife while he was away, only to find out they used everything for themselves. How does that image land with you personally? In what ways might believers—including yourself—be using what God has entrusted to them for personal benefit rather than for the church?

8. Pastor Mike noted that the rate of marriage in America has dropped from 69 percent in 1970 to 50 percent today, and offered the explanation that Satan hates godly marriages because they reflect God's covenant. Do you agree? What other effects does the decline of covenant marriage have on the church and on future generations?

## **Personal Reflection**

9. Pastor Mike closed by asking: "What are you doing with your gifts? What are you doing with your talents? What are you doing with the breath in your lungs? Are you serving his bride?" How would you honestly answer those questions right now?
10. Is there an area of the church—children's ministry, hospitality, prayer, serving, outreach—where you have felt nudged to step in but have not yet acted? What has held you back?

## **Practical Applications**

### **For individuals**

- This week, identify one specific way you can serve your local church that you have not been doing. Take one concrete step toward that commitment before your group meets again.
- If you are married, reflect on whether your marriage reflects covenant love, sacrifice, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Identify one area where you can grow and discuss it honestly with your spouse.

### **For the Group**

- As a group, discuss what gifts and talents are represented among your members. Pray together about how those gifts might be used more intentionally to serve the church body.
- Consider adopting a specific ministry need at your church as a group project—whether that is serving in children's ministry, helping with setup, or supporting a community outreach effort.

### **For Ongoing Reflection**

- Throughout the week, ask yourself this question each morning: "What am I doing today with what God has entrusted to me, and does it serve His bride?"
- Read Ephesians 5:25-32 and Revelation 19:6-9 slowly and prayerfully. Let the imagery of Christ as groom and the church as bride shape how you see your role in the body.

# Prayer Requests & Closing

## Leader Notes

- Be sensitive to different perspectives on Israel; focus on biblical teaching rather than politics
- Encourage participation from everyone, but don't force anyone to share
- If someone wants to give their life to Christ during discussion, be prepared to pray with them
- Keep the discussion focused on personal application, not just theological debate
- Consider inviting someone knowledgeable about Israel or Jewish culture to a future meeting