



Maturing The Bride

SERIES: BOOK 1

GOD IS LOOKING FOR A **MATURE** BRIDE FOR HIS SON

BY: BOB SJOGREN



***This book coincides
with the
YouTube Channel:
*Maturing The Bride****

(Click On The Logo Above
If You Wish to See The
Videos That Coincides With
Each Chapter.)

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CHAPTER ONE

God is Looking for a Mature Bride for His Son

Hi, and welcome to Maturing the Bride. My name is Bob Sjogren and I am so excited you are reading this book. I hope and pray that what you are going to find in this book will blow you away. Personally, I've never heard it preached in any church that I've ever attended or visited. I've never heard it from any speaker on YouTube. It is something new, fresh, and I hope you agree, very biblical! Why it hasn't been talked about before is a mystery to me.

Before you begin reading, let me tell you a little bit about me so hopefully you can relate to me, at least a little. I came to know Christ personally my freshman year in college at Penn State University. I was involved in a college ministry and grew spiritually very quickly. By the end of my freshman year I was in one Bible study and leading another. By the end of my senior year, I had a group of three guys who each had their own groups, with some of those having groups. All in all, God had placed me over 52 young lives.

Upon graduating, I was challenged to take the Gospel where it had not been in decades—to Libya. I, along with three other young men, responded to that challenge. We formed a team and went to Libya, teaching English as a second language. After teaching for one year, I discovered that there was only one missionary for every one million Muslims I decided to come back and work at raising up laborers for the Muslim world.

After returning to the U.S., I helped a man by the name of Greg Livingstone start up a mission agency called Frontiers. I was with them for 20 years as a recruiter. During my time with Frontiers, I met a beautiful Southern belle who became my wife. We've been married now for over 35 years. We have four adult children who are all married, as well as three grandchildren as of the writing of this book (but we're hoping for a whole lot more)!

Regarding my spiritual journey, I've never been to seminary.

I've also never been to Bible School. In fact, I've never had a Bible course in my life. Probably like you, I'm your average lay person.

I have personally walked with God for over 40 years, but it has only been in the last five to ten years that my eyes have really been opened up to the material that is found in this book.

This material has changed my life completely and has helped me to understand God's Word so much better. I can now understand some of the tough passages that were so hard to understand before.

God's Word does not just instruct us about how to live this life here on earth, it also shows us what God is doing for all of eternity future. Learning this can change the way you live your life today. This book is here to challenge you to understand eternity future and what God's ultimate destiny is for you.

Depressing News

To accomplish this goal, I'm going to start with depressing news. Now you may be like my wife by asking, "Why is he starting off with depressing news?" The reason I am doing it is to show you that there is a problem. Once you understand that there is a problem, then you can find a solution.

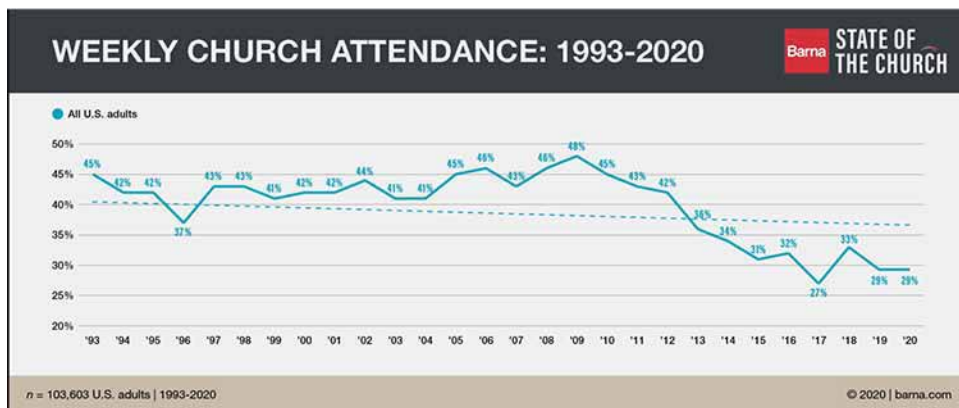
I believe that the church in America has a temperature, or a fever, or has been infected with a virus. Something is not right for the church as a whole in America. I base that theory on very simple statistics. I've been looking at statistics for a decade by following researchers who are documenting them. (These statistics are all pre-Covid; these numbers have nothing to do with Covid.)

Let me go over with you the basic statistics that put up some red flags in my mind; hopefully, you will also see these concerns. They are listed in bullet points to make them easier to digest.

- Six in ten Protestant churches are declining in attendance.
- Seventy-six churches close every week. That means that ten churches close every day.
- For every four churches that open, seven close. It is clear that the church is NOT gaining ground.
- Fifty-four pastors quit the pulpit every day.
- Eighty percent of all pastors believe pastoral ministries have negatively affected their families.
- Many pastors' children do not attend church now because of what the church has done to their parents. They say, "I'm

done with church.”

A simple graph illustrates this concerning trend:



If we look at the weekly church attendance between 1993 and 2020 (pre-Covid), we find that in 1993, 45% of Americans attended church weekly. Just before Covid in 2019-2020, 29% attended church weekly. We have dropped from 45% down to 29% in less than seven years.

In the 1960's attendance was up to 63%. We have almost lost half of our church attendance in one generation.

Here's our final statistic:

- Three thousand five hundred (3,500) people leave the church every day.

Does this sound right to you? Does this sound like something God wants? I don't think so either.

Because this is not the way it is supposed to be, we have to ask a question: Could something be wrong in how we are reading and understanding the Bible? Could there be a problem with our focus or what we are getting from it?

I want to suggest to you that the answer is, "Yes, there could be something wrong." The goal of this book and the videos on YouTube is to give you the big picture in understanding the Bible and to see where we have been off just a little!

Now, different people have different ways of looking at the Scriptures to see the big picture. On the next page are some of the ways that I see quite frequently.

- The Bible is all about salvation. Therefore, how can we get saved?

- It's all about Jesus and we have to worship Jesus and exalt Him.
- It's all about love; God is love and so it's about loving God.
- It's all about the kingdom of God and getting that kingdom here and now on this earth.
- It's all about helping people live their lives here on this earth.

These are just a few, but I hope it is obvious to you that there are a lot of different ways of understanding the big picture of this Book.

If you go to a seminary bookstore, you can find a book called *Major Bible Themes* and the contents cover 52 vital doctrines of Scriptures simplified. Fifty-two vital Bible themes—are we supposed to know all these? Do all these have differences?

Some researchers report that there are 32,000 different denominations here on this earth. Thirty-two thousand different ways of living out Christianity on this third rock from the sun. Is that what God wants? Are all of these divisions and separations a part of God's plan?

Is the Bible really that hard to understand? Do we need a seminary degree or a Bible college degree to grasp it, or is it possible that lay people like you and me can truly understand this Book?

It Is Possible for the Average Lay Person to Understand the Bible. You Do Not Need A Seminary or Bible College Degree.

I want you to hear this: Yes, it is possible for the average lay person to understand this book. You do not need a seminary or Bible college degree. You just need a little tweak on where your focus lies.

We usually focus on our lives on this earth, but I want to challenge you. We need a bigger picture. We need to look at living with an eternal perspective—living for eternity future. Once you understand what God is doing in eternity future, so many things begin to make sense.

If you don't understand the big picture of what God is doing in eternity future, you are never truly going to understand your purpose here on earth. You will be spiritually blinded in so many ways. There will be huge chunks of Scripture that will baffle or confuse you because they do not seem to make sense, or, they

may seem to totally contradict each other. In both cases, you are left scratching your head thinking, “This just doesn’t make sense.”

For many Christians, these contradictions build up over time and many just give up on God. This may be right where you are now. Or maybe you’re spiritually young and feeling great about God. However, five, ten, fifteen, or twenty years from now you may want to throw in the towel. I have seen it so many times—people in their fifties and sixties giving up on God. I do not want that for you because then you will become one of the 3,500 who leave the church every day.

The Big Picture

Summarizing the big picture of the Bible isn’t that tough to do. In fact, it is quite simple, and here it is:

God is looking for a bride for His Son.

The idea of a bride and groom draws a picture of deep intimacy. God wants deep intimacy with your soul. He wants you to have oneness with Him. He wants you to have eternal love—His steadfast love that never ceases. He wants that for you—that oneness between Him and you in life. He wants you to have eternal significance.

God is basically telling each one of us, “I want you to be My bride; I desire eternal intimacy and significance for you.”

This concept is found from cover to cover in the Bible. It starts in Genesis and ends in Revelation.

Did you know that in the very beginning there was a wedding? This wedding was between Adam and Eve. God made Adam and said it was not good for him to be alone. Then God created and brought Eve to Adam to be his wife.

“It is not good for man to be alone,” said the Lord. “Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.” “At last, this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’ because she was taken out of man,” said the man. (Genesis 2:18, 22-23)

At the very end of the Bible there is another wedding: that of Jesus and His bride. Jesus is going to marry His bride for all eternity future.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made

herself ready. (Revelation 19:7)

God started with a wedding and ended with a wedding. This is the big clue to the big picture of what God is doing down here. But the biggest clue comes in the middle of the Bible.

In Matthew (not really the middle but the beginning of the New Testament), Jesus talks about the kingdom of God being like a wedding feast. God is looking for a bride for His Son.

The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. (Matthew 22:2)

That is what life is all about. The 80 or so years we have on this planet is not “life”; 99.99999999% of existence happens after we die. And what happens there is the whole reason we were created. God created us to be a part of His bride for His Son.

You may be thinking, “does God need a bride for his Son?” Great question. And, the answer is no. God doesn’t need one, He wants one. Why? Because God is love.

Whoever does not love God does not know God because God is love. (1 John 4:8)

I have been married to my wife Debby for decades. We are now in our third decade of marriage. Something I have learned from her, because she is a woman of great love, is this: love loves to love. My wife recently took on a temporary job as a hostess at Chicken Salad Chick—just so that she could love on people. She did not do it for the money; she did it because she wanted just to love people—because love loves to love.

God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit want to share love, and not just among themselves; they have been doing that for all eternity past. They want their love to spill over to others. God created a creation to love and He wants a bride—who will share a deep intimacy in love—for His Son.

A Special Kind of Bride

I was teaching this at a church in Kenya in a town called Garsen on the Indian coast. As I was talking about God’s desire to get a bride for His Son, I saw a woman on the front row who looked like she had older kids. So, I asked her a few questions.

“Mama, let me ask you a question,” I said.

“Yes,” she said.

“Do you have children?” I asked.

“Yes, I have children,” she answered.

“Are they older?” I continued.

“Yeah,” she replied.

“Do you have boys?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Is one of marrying age?”

“Yes, one is.” She said.

“Are you looking for a bride for your son?”

“Oh, yes,” she replied with great pride.

“Okay, let me ask you another question then. Are you looking for a mature bride or an immature bride for your son?” I asked.

She looked a little bit annoyed and said, “Well of course I am looking for a mature bride for my son.”

I said, “I think that is what God the Father wants for His Son.”

God just doesn’t want a bride for His Son. God wants a mature bride for His Son. That is what He is looking for as well.

Let me give a news flash.
If you have never heard of this
before, hear it now because it
has great significance. We do
not instantly mature when we
die. How do we know this?

News Flash:
We Don't Instantly Mature
When We Die.

In Revelation 6, those who have died for their belief in Jesus, the martyrs, are in heaven looking down and observing seeing what is happening on this earth. They cry out to God saying these words:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain... They cried out in a loud voice, O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?
(Revelation 6:9,10)

Look at the text. These martyred believers are yearning and crying out for understanding. They want some answers because they don’t know everything. Why? They are still growing, maturing, and learning things.

We do not instantly mature when we die and go to heaven.

Our Goal Is to Mature

Jesus encouraged us to mature. He did that in the parable about the sower. That story is about a farmer who had four seeds. The first one dies because it is eaten by the birds. The second fell on rocky soil and never grew roots; thus, it died. The third one grew some but died because the weeds and the thorns choked it out. The fourth seed produces a crop that was a hundred times as much as had been planted.

Let us focus on the third seed:

And as for what fell among the thorns, some hear but as they go on the way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and their fruit does not mature. (Luke 8:14).

Do you see those key words? Their fruit does not mature. The goal is not simply to be planted but to mature. Our goal is not simply to become a believer by praying a prayer. Jesus wants us to mature. The disciples knew this was their goal as well. It is not simply about coming to Christ, and the Apostle Paul taught that.

So, we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect (mature) in their relationship with Christ. That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me. (Colossians 1:28-29)

Paul knew the goal was to mature and he warned and taught people about that.

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. (Colossians 4:12)

Apparently Epaphras knew it too.

Paul says the same thing to the Corinthians.

Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking, be mature. (1 Corinthians 14:20)

He wants us to mature. Your goal is to mature as a believer.

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood, to the measure the stature fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

Peter knew about this too.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation. (1 Peter 2:2)

Growing up into salvation refers to maturing. That is what we are supposed to do.

The writer of the Hebrews knew about this.

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:14)

He continues in Hebrews 6:1:

Therefore, let us leave the elementary gospel of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

Did you catch that? Go on to maturity.

James writes about it, too.

And let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:4)

Perfect and complete! I call that mature.

Disciple after disciple, writer after writer, and Jesus Himself urge us to grow and become mature. That is our goal. The key thing is to know how different this is from simply praying a prayer.

However, not everyone sees life this way.

I have traveled around the world. And constantly I hear people say, "Yeah, I prayed the prayer and I invited Jesus into my life. I am good because I prayed. I'm saved."

Dear reader, if this is you, I want to challenge you with something. Salvation is necessary, but it is a stepping stone to something far bigger, greater, and more important. The goal of this life is not simply about praying a prayer. We have been taught that salvation is the end goal. The church has been too focused on people "praying a prayer to get saved."

Many leaders in many churches have placed too much



emphasis on checking off “saved” in the status box. They always close the service (no matter what the sermon was on) by saying something like, “Maybe you don’t even have a personal relationship with God and you want to start one now. With every eye closed....”

(you know the rest), and then as we sit in silence with our eyes closed, we hear, “Praise the Lord! I see you brother, up there in the balcony. God bless you. I see that hand over there, young lady. Praise God. Yes, I see you too....”

That is what the church is focused on and that seems to be the end goal. But that goal falls short.

I’ve never seen a church end the service saying, “Hey, many of you have been acting like children and now it is time to start getting serious about maturing. If that is you, come on down....” The thought of maturing the bride is quite honestly the furthest thing from our mind. We just want people to “pray the prayer.”

Maturing the bride has *not* been the main goal. As a result, we are raising many people who are prone to becoming hypocrites. That is why we have gone from 45% to 29% church attendance. We have not been maturing and discipling people.

That, however, should be our main goal. We should be pouring our lives into those that take that first step of salvation. We need to be maturing them because God wants a mature bride for His Son. That is the big picture of eternity future. That is what God wants. His GOAL is for each of us to mature as a believer and grow deeply in our knowledge of God and prepare to be a part of His bride.

Remember, there was a wedding at the beginning of the Bible. There is a wedding at the end of the Bible, and Jesus says in the middle that the kingdom of God is like a king who prepares a wedding banquet for his son. God is looking for a mature bride.

Now the opposite of that should be obvious—God is not looking for an immature bride for His Son. I did not want that for either of my sons. In fact, if they were looking at very young and immature girls to be their brides, I would have had to sit with them and tell them, “Listen, we need to talk, I do not think this is going to work out.”

He is not looking for just any person to be a part of the bride; He is not looking for an immature bride. God desires a mature bride for

His Son. That is the big picture and it is that simple.

CHAPTER TWO

What Will the Bride Be Doing?

God is looking for a mature bride for His Son. Salvation is just a stepping stone to something far bigger and more important. Many churches, however, are so focused on getting people saved that they forget about maturing them.

My wife found this out as a young lady at our church was baptized. A few weeks later she called the young lady and asked her if anybody had called or followed up with her. She said, “No.” So my wife asked her if she would like to meet up and she replied, “Yes.”

Debby spent three years discipling her. This young lady’s life was changed completely because Debby built a relationship with her and walked with her through life and taught her the Scriptures. Discipleship is key. Saying a prayer is one thing; maturing and growth is something different. Our goal as a believer is to mature because we are going to be a part of the bride.

But in our second time together, we are going to be asking a different question and that question is this: What are we going to be doing as his bride?

Think Ahead

When I was teaching a class to some homeschoolers on this material, I used the graphic below.



All of the students got what I was trying to communicate graphically. This piece of art reveals the designer did not appropriately plan ahead. He was telling people to plan ahead when he himself was not planning ahead.

This is not God's method. God thinks ahead. He looked at eternity future and determined what He wanted; He has been thinking ahead.

And when God does something, He does it BIG.

I found this out when I realized that God has been putting His glory on display within creation itself. He has been putting His glory on display in four dimensions.

One of the ways is with the beetles. Many times, I have asked my audience, "When God went to put His glory on display with the beetle, how many beetles did He create to accomplish that goal?"

Almost all of them are clueless. Many guess—maybe a hundred, five hundred, ten thousand, eight thousand. Those are big guesses, but they don't even come close.

The answer may astound you. When God went to put His glory on display with the beetle, He made 350,000 different types of beetles.

When God put His glory on display with the beetles He did it BIG. That is our God, the God we worship. He is a BIG God with a BIG vision.

Now think about what He will want to do with His Son's bride! Are we, His Son's bride, going to play a small or little role? Will we be like a maid to Him? Nope. That's not our God.

His plans for His Son's bride are BIG. I hope that you are as amazed as I am! God's thoughts for us for eternity future may seem unbelievable to us because they are so BIG!

Co-Heirs

So, what is his bride going to be doing?

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:16,17)

We are co-heirs with Christ. A co-heir is defined as any person who shares an inheritance with one or more people. Whatever one gets, the others equally get.

I have three siblings. After my parents died, the inheritance was passed down to us four kids. Each of us received ¼ of the inheritance from my parents. We were co-heirs of my parents.

And since we are co-heirs with Christ, whatever Christ inherits,

we inherit. What does Christ inherit?

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world. (Hebrews 1:1,2)

What are all things? Many times, my audiences are stuck on this one but they should be. So, I help them along by asking them these questions:

Does Christ get the trees? (Yes.) How about the mountains? (Yes) How about the continents? (Yes) How about the entire planet? (Yes) How about Mercury, Venus and Mars? (Yes) The entire solar system? (Yes) What about the Milky Way galaxy? (Yes) What about all of the hundreds of billions of galaxies? (Yes). So, in other words, Christ inherits the universe? (Yes)

Now they're starting to wake up. "If Christ inherits the universe, then we, as His co-heirs, also inherit the universe. Now that's BIG. That's REALLY BIG."

Getting to heaven is not just getting up there and kicking our feet up in the cloud, resting and eating grapes for eternity future. No, we inherit the universe.

But for what purpose? Why is He doing that? Why are we inheriting the universe? What is this all about? Our answer is found in one verse in Ephesians which tells us why we are saved. In telling us why we are saved, it gives a purpose statement. Here it is:

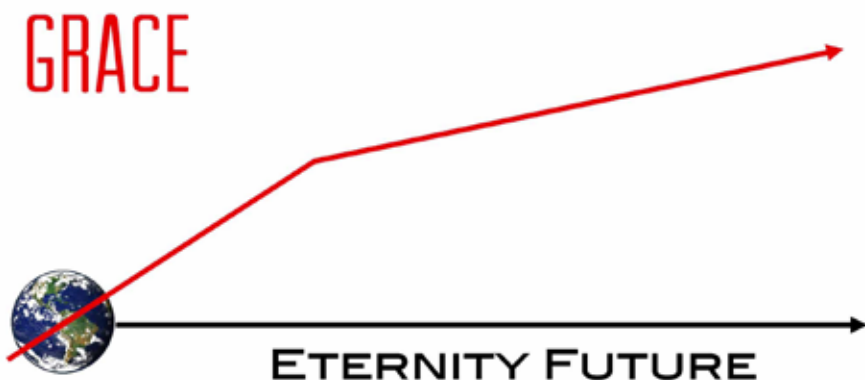
And he raised us with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realm with Jesus Christ so that in the coming ages he may show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6,7)

To help my audiences understand the power of this purpose statement, I ask them to hold up their hands as if they are being robbed. Instead of putting their fingers up, though, I ask them to keep their fist closed and start counting on one hand how many times God refers to Himself and on the other hand how many times He refers to us in the purpose statement. You'll see it below.

And he raised us with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realm with Jesus Christ so that in the coming ages he may show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6,7)

God referred to himself four times and to us once. Now remember, this is all about why we are saved. Think about this for a second. God is basically saying, “80% of the reason I am seating you in the heavenly realm with Christ Jesus is about what I get to do.” (And we thought heaven was all about us—streets paved with gold and mansions awaiting us.) No, we missed 80% of what heaven is about. It is not about us.

What does God get to do? He gets to show the immeasurable riches of His grace. The Greek verb for “show” used in this passage is *endeiknymi*, which means: to point out, to show, demonstrate, prove whether by arguments or by acts, to manifest, display, put forth. In all eternity future, God wants to put forth, display, to prove and to live out His grace. That is what He wants to do. And He wants to display and show off His grace—forever. That is the God we worship and serve. He does something BIG.



In this simple graph, we have earth on the lower left part for however long this earth lives until Christ comes back and the earth is destroyed. Then there is a new earth and heaven for all eternity future. For all eternity future, what God is saying in that passage is that He wants to show off, live out, and put His grace on display forever in the ages to come.

So now the key question becomes, how is He going to do that? Think about what God could do to show off His grace. Think outside the box—no limits!

When I ask for answers from my live audiences, slowly someone raises a hand and says, “He could love us.” I encourage them to think more outside the box. “Let us know the Son, forgive our sins, and give us a relationship with him.” (Way too inside the box.) After about two minutes they are stuck, so I help them along.

“Could God make us Gods like himself?” No, they reply quickly.

“But what could He do just short of that?” Their minds begin to turn and then usually someone raises a timid hand and says, “What if God allows us to rule and reign with him forever?”

Bingo, that’s the right answer. That is grace and it’s huge and BIG—just the way God does things. He not only loves us, He not only redeems us, He not only gives us a relationship with Himself, but He allows us to rule and reign with Him over the universe!

Don’t read over this too quickly. Marinate on this for a while. We are going to be ruling and reigning over the universe with Christ. That’s God’s BIG plan for us, because He wants to put His grace on display.

That is huge, great, and big! That is our God and is what He is doing. We, as the bride, are going to be ruling and reigning with Christ over the universe.

*We Are Going to be
Ruling and Reigning
Over the Universe
with Christ*

Is it in the Scriptures? Yes.

To one who conquers I will grant him to sit with me on my throne also as I conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Revelation 3:21)

Christ says if you conquer and finish strong you are going to rule and reign with Him. Scripturally, a throne always has three things associated with it: (1) someone is in charge; (2) there is a territory to govern; and (3) there are citizens to govern. This will not be a “make-believe” throne. It will be a real throne from which we will govern.

But this isn’t the only verse that points us in this direction.

To the one who conquers and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over nations. (Revelation 2:26)

If we endure hardship, we shall also reign with him. If we deny him, he will deny us. (2 Timothy 2:12)

For we have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence from within. (Hebrews 3:14)

The Greek word “share in” found in Hebrews 3 is translated differently in Luke 5:7. There it is translated, “partner with.” In other words, you could accurately translate Hebrews 3:14 as “we have come to partner with Christ.” How will be partner with Him? By ruling and reigning with Him.

What Heaven Is Like

Dear reader, if you haven't realized it yet, Heaven is not a twenty-four-hour worship service.

In the past, when my son, Hunter, was a teenager, he and his friends would gather at my studio for "Digging Deeper" weekend. It lasted 24-hours. During that time, we examined and discussed questions about God and what He is doing. One of the weekends was on heaven.

I asked these kids, "What is heaven going to be like?"

A girl said that she thought it was going to be like her church worship service. After all of the teaching about heaven, she came back at the end and said, "I am so glad heaven is not going to be like my church's worship service. It is going to be exciting, yay!!"

We too can get excited!! Heaven will be much more than a 24-hour worship service. We will be ruling and reigning!

And heaven is not some eternal cloud formations where we float around in spirit form. In Hebrews 11:16, the writer talks about those great people of faith who gave things up.

But as it is, they desire a great country that is a heavenly realm. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city. (Hebrews 11:16)

Why would he say God is preparing them a city? He was referencing heaven. The reason he used the idea of a city is probably because heaven is like a city.

What do cities have? Cities have streets, homes, malls, government, sports and so much more. This means that heaven will have all of that as well! Heaven will not be a 24-hour worship service.

Paul understood that we are going to be ruling and reigning in this heaven. He even told us over whom we will be ruling and reigning. Look at what he wrote to the Corinthians:

And do you not know the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Don't you know that we are to judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:2,3)

We are going to be ruling and reigning over angels! Salvation is just a stepping stone to something very BIG; the big goal to rule and reign. So, he is saying that he wants you to mature so that you can be put in charge of something very BIG. Your goal as a

believer is to mature. You need to mature so that you can rule and reign with Christ over the universe.

But not everyone is designed by God to rule and reign. My wife has said that she does not want to rule and reign. Her gift is hospitality. She has told me many times, “I don’t want to rule and reign over anything.” God knows this. And I believe she will be doing primarily what she is gifted to do throughout eternity—host people.

The gifts that you have now are the gifts you are going to use in heaven; mature with them. Grow and develop them as well as a deep intimacy in your love for Christ. Mature in your relationship with God. Mature in making good decisions, mature in justice, mature in loving others, and mature in taking care of others to prepare to rule and to reign with Christ for eternity.

So, when did God think up this idea of us ruling and reigning with his Son for all eternity future? Read on into the next chapter and be stunned.

CHAPTER THREE

God Dreamed Up Your Future A LONG Time Ago!

God is looking for a bride for His Son. But as we've stated before, God is not just looking for any bride; He is looking for a mature bride for His Son. In the last section we learned that together, as the bride of Christ, we shall rule and reign with Him over the universe.

Christ says, "The one who conquers I will grant him to sit with me on my throne as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Revelation 3:21)

Sitting down on the throne means to rule and reign. To review, a throne has three things: (1) someone is in charge; (2) property to govern; and (3) people to govern. That is the role God wants for you and me for all of the eternity future.

Our earthly goal is to mature as a believer. I am challenging you to recognize that much of the church—both in the United States of America and around the world—is so focused on getting people to pray to be saved that discipling or maturing them is neglected.

Consider: Revelation 3:21—to sit with him on the throne. Sitting with God on His throne is huge! Because it is so big, it makes me want to ask a question, when did God think this idea up?

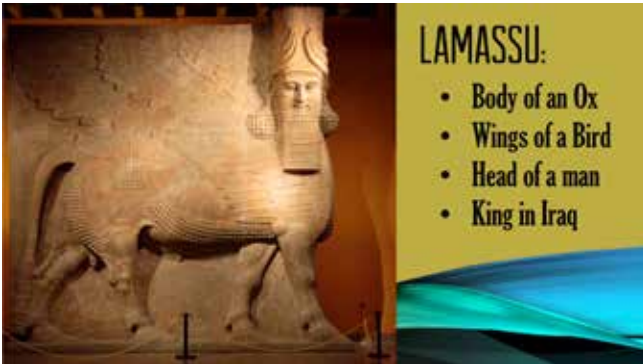
When Did God Think This Up?

Is God making this up as He goes along? Did He get half way through the Old Testament and realize He needed to come up with a plan? Was His idea of "the bride and the groom thing" like Oh, let's get Jesus a bride and have them rule and reign in eternity future? Is that what is happening? No, that is not what is happening.

In fact, three places in Scripture show this was God's dream from the very beginning of the Bible. We are going to look at the beginning, the end, and then the middle of the Bible.

*In the beginning, God created mankind in his own image.
In the image of God, he created them male and female.
(Genesis 1:27)*

Here at the very beginning of the Bible, there is this phrase “In the image of God.” When this phrase was used it had connotations all over in various cultures. Culturally, kings were considered to be ‘in the image of God.’



What you are looking at here on the left is lamassu. Lamassu is a very large statue. The statue has the body of an ox, wings of a bird, head of a man, and it was to represent a king in Iraq.

The king in Iraq had a statue made up of himself and it was huge. The image was to be a physical representation of the king who represented God, who was “god” in their terms. They were put at the entrances to the temples and of the cities. You would walk into the cities and look up and see this huge statue of this lamassu and you would be in fear of that statue because it was so big.

This king “god” defined what was right and wrong. He created, he destroyed, he ruled, and he governed. This statue figure in Hebrew was known as tselem; in modern-day translation this means “an idol” or “an image.”

Kings/rulers made images of themselves portraying themselves as gods. They called themselves “the image of God.” These gods ruled, governed, and reigned.

There are three places where we see this.

The First Place: God Duties

In the first verse of the Bible, we see God Himself doing this. As God, he created...

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1)*

That’s what kings do. And since God is a King, this is what He did! And He told us so in the first verse of the Bible. He is the King of kings. He created the heavens and the earth. He was the one

who created all things.

Then God said, “Let the land produce all vegetation; seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bears fruits with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” (Genesis 1:11)

He created the plants, trees, grass...all that was on the earth.

So, God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing in the waters with which the waters teem that moves about in it, (Genesis 1:19)

He created the tiny little fish all the way to the great whale. God the Creator created all the living things in the waters with which the waters teem.

And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground and the wild animals each according to its kind.” (Genesis 1:24)

He created the panda, butterfly, zebra, and tiger—every creature on the face of this earth. God created because that’s what kings do. Kings dreamt things up with what they had from the material world around them. God made things totally from scratch. And in the peak of His creativity, he did something most people would think was unthinkable. He made something “in His own image.”

Then God said, “let us make man in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” (Genesis 1:26)

This means we are made in the image of God, in the image of a king. Humanity is made in God’s image. We have “God duties.” We are to rule, reign, govern, and say what is right and wrong. We are to look at what the physical world has to offer around us and making things out of it. This was something brand new and had not been seen in literature back in those days. It was only for kings.

But now every human is to be like a king. We are supposed to be ruling, conquering, and reigning! We are to govern and take care of nature. We are supposed to be watching this planet and taking care of it.

All of this was radical revelation in the Old Testament. It was a brand-new concept.

You see, in mythology, gods created people to serve them—not to be a ruler of any kind. That was God’s job or the king’s job. But God said, “You are in my image. I rule and reign, and I want you to rule and reign.” We do not serve the gods. We are made in God’s image. Our Creator wants us to rule and reign with Him.

And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish in the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:28)

Subdue means “to subjugate, keep under, bring into bondage, tread down, force, dominate.” In Hebrew, to rule is *Rada*; this is royal language for kings. Subdue is what kings do. God uses terminology for kings and is saying to us, I am preparing you for eternity future. I have a game plan for all of eternity future. I want you to rule and reign with Me; therefore, let us just try it here on this earth. Just rule over the sea and the birds in the air—for now!

People are not supposed to make images of God because God has already made images of Himself and that is us. We are created in the image of God. We are created in His image to rule and to reign like Him.

*I am Going To Give You an
Eighty-Year Trial Period Down
Here on the Earth to prepare
You for What I Have for you for
all Eternity Future.*

What God is basically saying is this: “I’m going to give you an eighty-year trial period down here on the earth to prepare you for what I have for you for all eternity future.”

CS Lewis writes about the future each one of us has and says these words as if being on a subway in the underground. “If you knew the plans God has for the person seated next to you in the subway, you would be tempted to get down on your knees and worship that person.” He understood God’s plan for us in eternity future and the idea of ruling and reigning forever. He is saying we need to see that in ourselves and in others.

Part of the job of an image-bearer is to reflect God to others. We are to make God famous to the other image-bearers around us. That is our goal—to be image-bearers of God. Not only to rule and to govern the earth but also to make God look good and to somewhat be like those statues: showing people what love and life is, being kind, and showing justice and mercy.

Does that mean we are going to rule and reign over each

other? No. We are all created equally in the image of God. Ruling and reigning over each other was never God's plan—unless you consider serving each other as a part of ruling and reigning.

Ruling and reigning in a hierarchical sense is not in God's agenda. We are all created equally in the image of God. Remember this took place in the context of the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were in that garden. The fruits, trees, plants, and flowers were all to satisfy them—for them to be able to eat and be satisfied. However, because of sin and the curse, life became more difficult. We now have to work much harder (part of the curse to produce fruit and destroy weeds) in the context of a garden.

What was God planning? He wanted us to plant crops: corn, green pepper, watermelon, zucchini, and onions. Essentially, God said, "I want you to grow plants to feed yourselves. I want you to have families and kids so that you love them. I want the families to grow and have grandchildren and for them to have families too."

"While you are at that, I want you to create communities where you can love one another and reflect My image to others and grow together. As you do all of that, I also want you to develop culture, style, dance, songs. I want you to develop a culture to reflect your unique group of people."

All of this is God simply saying, "I want you to subdue and rule to prepare you to rule and reign with Me for all eternity future over the universe."

Our assignment here on this earth mirrors what God has for us for all eternity future. God gave it to us in the very first chapter of the Bible. In Genesis 1, we see the seeds of what God planned in having us in his image and having us rule and reign with him. What an incredible God!

The Second Place

Let us look at the second place where God hints at this. It is found at the very end of the Bible:

"You made them be kingdoms and priests, to serve our God and they shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:10)

They shall reign on the earth? This is royal language. This is something only kings do. Only kings rule here on the earth. God says, Yes, I am going to make you like kings. I am going to have you rule over the earth.

"To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I am going to give authority over nations." (Revelation 2:28)

“To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.” (Revelation 3:21)

Once again, this is language only used for kings!

Men and women, you are of royal descent. This is where you come from. This is your lineage. You are a child of the living king!

No wonder John was blowing us away when he wrote these words:

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1)

We are children of the King of kings. We are princes and princesses You—you who are reading this right now—you are a child of a king; own it in your soul and heart. God has given you the tremendous privilege to be royalty with plans to rule and reign forever. What a God who thought this up!

The Third Place

The third place we will consider in God’s Word is in the book of Matthew. This passage refers to Judgment Day and Christ is separating the sheep from the goats based on their works. We read these words:

Then the King said to those on the right, ‘Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” (Matthew 25:34)

Now, first look at the words inherit the kingdom, like co-inherit. We are going to be called co-heirs with Christ; as Christ inherits the kingdom (Luke 19:12), so do we inherit the kingdom. That is our God. He has a kingdom prepared just for you according to your likes, your wants, and your giftings. If you recall that my wife likes hospitality, she is going to be running some kind of hospitality for all eternity because that is what she does best.

The next key words: *from the foundation of the world*. What does that mean? We have referenced eternity future, but I want to challenge you: there is also an eternity past. In other words, before he put the first electron together, before he created the first angel or spirit, before creating anything on this earth, there was an eternity in the past. Remember, God doesn’t have a birth date. God never began—He always was.

For eternity past God has always existed. In that eternity past,

there were no angels, demons, humanity, earth, creation. All that existed was God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. A perfect trinity existed in eternity past. That is all there was.

And remember, God is love, and love loves to love. God the Father loved the Son. God the Father also loved the Holy Spirit. God the Son loved the Spirit. He also loved the Father. The Spirit loved the Son and the Father as well. It was a perfect love.

And because love loves to love, God wanted it to spill out over to others, but there weren't any "others" created yet. So, what did God do?

God said, "I am going to create creatures that I can love. Creatures with whom I can have a relationship and share intimacy like a husband with his wife—like a bride and a groom." And so, God created.

In eternity past, God had a dream. God's dream was to get a bride for His Son. God wanted to create a creation with whom He can love and have intimacy. Together with His Son, they shall rule and reign over the universe.

As a result, our goal is to mature as believers. Salvation is just a stepping stone in something much bigger and greater than we can ever imagine. We need to be disciplined. We need to grow and mature from salvation to prepare us for this role He has planned for us.

All of this was thought up in eternity past. When Adam and Eve sinned, God did not say, "Whoops! Where did that come from? We have to do something. We have got to make a payment for their sins, they cannot do it, and we are perfect and holy. What are we going to do? Anybody got any ideas? Hey, Jesus, how about you go there and leave a perfect life and die for them and that would be a payment for their sin. And then we can have a relationship. What do you think about that Jesus?"

It did not happen. God never says, "whoops."

We know this because of what Peter tells us in his first chapter.

"For you know, it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life that was handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you"
(1 Peter 1:18-20)

He was chosen before the creation of the world.

In other words, in eternity past God foresaw that Jesus was going to die for the sins of humanity. God did not make up this plan as time went on. God always had a plan and He is living it out.

God has been thinking the whole time, “I want my Son to rule over the universe with His bride—to have an intimate union of a husband with his wife forever.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Is This New to God?

God is looking for a bride for His Son, but not just any bride. He is looking for a mature bride for His Son. That is what I wanted for my own sons and I think that is what God wants for His Son. We are going to be ruling over the universe with Christ as His bride. This is what God does when He puts his glory on display.

Remember, God did not make just one beetle; he made 350,000 different types of beetles to put His glory on display. That is our God. He does things BIG.

In being a part of the bride of Christ, He wants the bride to do something BIG, not just some small role of cleaning house and being a cook. He wants us to rule and reign with Him over the universe.

So, here is the question for this chapter: Is this idea new for God? The idea of having us co-ruling, co-reigning with others over the universe?

Let me introduce you to Michael Heiser. He is an Old Testament scholar, Hebrew linguist, and Christian. Dr. Heiser has given us a better understanding of this concept of God ruling and reigning in conjunction with others. It comes from his book, *The Unseen Realm*.



He writes, “God is already ruling and reigning with a current divine counsel.”¹

Did those words impact you as they did me? I wanted to cry out, “WHAT? IS THIS A TYPO? GOD IS ALREADY RULING AND REIGNING WITH A DIVINE COUNCIL? WHERE IS THAT IN THE BIBLE?”

He gets this information from Psalm 82:1.

God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment. (Psalm 82:1)

¹ *The Unseen Realm, Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, Michael Heiser, page 32.

God is the word *Elohim* in Hebrew. The word *Elohim* is the second most common word in the Old Testament for “god” and we associate it with God. We worship the one true God, the God of gods, the King of kings, the God above all gods assuming that everything else are idols. But here, in this passage in God’s Word, *Elohim* is also used and translated as “gods.”

Dr. Heiser had taught Hebrew to many in his classes through the years, and he realized he was seeing this usage for the very first time. He writes in *The Unseen Realm*,

*“We must reconsider our selective supernaturalism and recover a biblical theology of the unseen world.”*²

On page 11, he writes,

“The God of the Old Testament was part of an assembly—a pantheon—of other gods. I had taught my students that any other ‘gods’ referenced in the Bible were just idols. That did not make sense here. The God of Israel isn’t a part of a group of idols.”

He suggests a new definition for *Elohim* with a biblical and more accurate understanding of the word. That new definition is simply a being in the spiritual world. The God that we worship is a being. The other gods (*Elohim* with a small “g”) in the divine counsel are also beings. They are all *Elohim*.

Note how this is used in Deuteronomy.

*They (the Israelites) sacrificed to demons(**shedim**), that were not gods (**Elohim**), to gods (**Elohim**) they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. (Deuteronomy 32:17)*

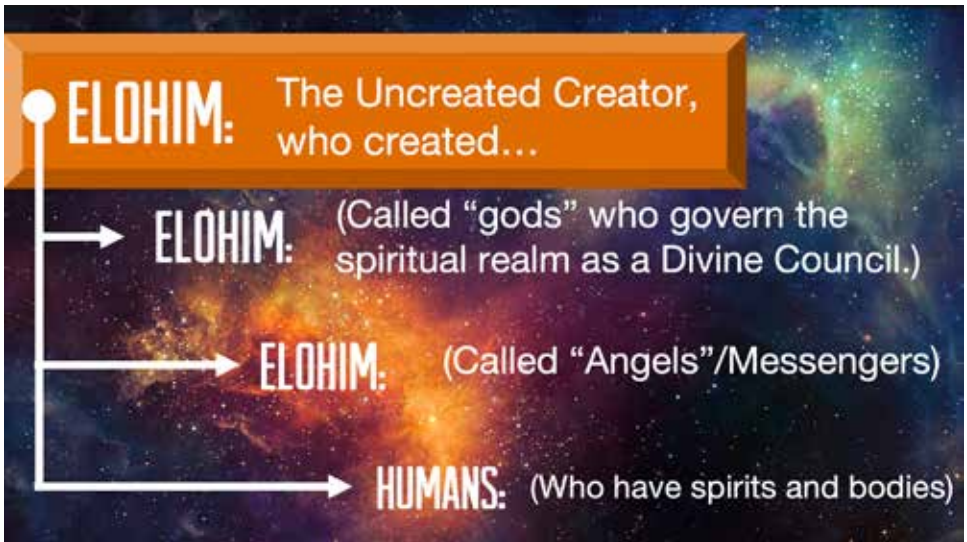
Demons are spiritual beings. *Elohim* is a spiritual being as well. The above text tells us that demons are *elohim*.

They Are Not All Equal

But what we need to know is that there are ranks in the *Elohim*. They are not all equal. The God that we worship is the God of all gods, the un-created Creator who created all things. He is the ultimate power. That is why he is called the King of kings, the God of all gods.

But under Him are also other *Elohim* called gods who govern the spiritual realm as a part of the divine counsel. This is what we observe in Psalm 82: God was governing in the divine council.

2 *The Unseen Realm, Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, Michael Heiser, page 18



Then there are other Elohim called angels or messengers. They are the ones who serve or bring forth the commands that the other Elohim and the God of gods command to happen. And so, three ranks are established here.

Below those ranks are the humans, not Elohim. Although we are also spiritual beings, we are different as we have both spirits and bodies. Thus, we recognize “beings” having different ranks. God, the King of kings and the Lord of lords is over a divine council made up of beings also called gods who help govern the universe. Under them are the angels who are the messengers; they fulfill the will and wishes of the divine counsel, and then there are human beings.

For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods (elohim). (Psalm 97:9)

What Heiser is pointing out is that all other gods are in the second level of Elohim. Our God, the God that we worship, is above all other Elohim. He is the God of gods, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods (in the Elohim) he holds judgment. (Psalm 82:1)

There is a divine council among the gods and Elohim, where our Almighty God holds judgment. Thus, there is a council right now, somewhere in the heavens, of spiritual beings that God governs and rules; He is in charge of them and holds the highest authority.

The Decision Makers

What does this divine council do? They seem to help make and implement decisions.

In Dr. Heiser's book, *The Unseen Realm*, we have three examples from the Scriptures of this divine council making decisions.

The first example is Micaiah prophesying against Ahab. In 1 Kings 22, the king of Syria is coming to attack the northern kingdom of Israel.

The king of the northern kingdom, Ahab (who is a bad king), calls upon the king of the southern kingdom of Israel, Jehoshaphat (a good king) for help. Ahab asks for Jehoshaphat's help to defend his kingdom against the king from Syria. They agree to work together.

They call upon the prophets and ask if God is going to give them success. The prophets tell them they will have success against the king of Syria. They claim these two kings will have a sure victory. But Jehoshaphat does not completely accept it.

Jehoshaphat (the good king) asks, "Isn't there supposed to be another prophet around here?" He desires a word from the Lord and does not feel confident in what these prophets offer. Jehoshaphat basically senses what they are saying seems 'a little too good to be true.'

King Ahab admits that there is another prophet, Micaiah. Then Ahab reveals that he hates this guy because he always says something bad about me. Jehoshaphat wants to hear from this prophet, so Ahab has him summoned. In fact, Micaiah does tell them Ahab will fall.

1 Kings, Micaiah said:

"Therefore, hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left." (1 Kings 22:19)

Micaiah, the prophet, shares that he saw God, in the heavens, sitting on His throne and the divine council ("Host of heaven" is code for this "divine council") standing around God.

*"...and the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. Then **a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, 'I will entice him.'** And the Lord said,*

‘By what means?’ And the spirit said, ‘I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And he said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.’” (1 Kings 22:20-23)

Ahab did not like this predicted outcome of his death so he had Micaiah taken to prison; Micaiah stated that if Ahab returned from battle alive, then “the Lord has not spoken to me.” (1 Kings 22:28) Well, God had spoken to Micaiah. Ahab died.

God knew that it was time for Ahab to fall and die. So, he called the divine council and asked them how they were going to do this. The armies went to battle and Ahab died in battle and never came back.

The key thing for us to see in this example is that God had a divine council with whom He worked. God co-labors with others in making decisions. Right now, God has a divine council that He uses to make decisions here on this earth.

The Second Example

Dr. Heiser writes that we find the second example in the creation account:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”
(Genesis 1:26-27)

Note the words “us,” “our” and “our”: Let us make man, our image, our likeness. Then he goes on and says: “he” and “he”. So, we see both plural and singular pronouns. Of course, we think the plural pronouns represent the Trinity.

Dr. Heiser says, “No, that doesn’t make sense.” He suggests the ‘our’ in this context is the divine council. Look again: “God says, ‘Let us make man in our image after our likeness.’”

The divine council has the right to have authority and make decisions. That is what our image is referencing. And he (God) says, we are the decision-makers; let us make man in our image and likeness. Let us give them the right to create and make decisions. They will reign and rule.

He, the Creator, created man in His own image. He (singular) is the Trinity—three in One; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. “He” references the Creator of all things. “Our” image and “us” refer to the divine council. Thus, we see the second example of God working together with the divine council to bring

about changes on this earth.

A Third Example

Let us look at the third passage as our last example. In chapter 4 of the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar describes his vision in verses 13-17:

“I saw in the visions of my head as I lay in my bed, and behold a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. He proclaimed aloud and said thus: ... the sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones...” (Daniel 4:13-17)

So, in this passage we see a being coming down and this being is referred to as a messenger of the holy ones. A watcher is a messenger of the holy ones. That could refer to the Trinity, but it seems more likely to be referring to this divine council—a divine council with whom God is working to make decisions with regard to the interactions of humanity on this planet.

These three examples help us see that God already co-labors with others to make decisions. God—right now—has a working council. It is already there and in place. He makes decisions with them. God is already co-laboring; thus, it makes sense that He would continue doing it for eternity future with the bride of Christ.

Does God need a divine council? The answer is clearly no. God does not need anything. If He needed something He would not be God. He wants a council for some reason (unknown to me). God delights in working together with others in leadership. God is the Leader of leaders and He is grooming others to lead with them.

Replacing The Divine Council

Now you may be asking yourself, “Wait! If He already has a working council, why is He looking for a bride for His Son?” Let’s consider this question in light of the second verse of Psalm 82:

God has taken his place in the divine council. In the counsel, he does judgment. How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? (Psalm 82:1-2)

Hold on! This text is telling us that there are those in the leadership team who are wicked and corrupt.

Men and women, right now in the divine council, some in God’s leadership team are corrupt, doing injustice, and leading others astray. Read the rest of verse Psalms 82:2:

“Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

God is giving them a lecture on what they should be doing. The divine council had made mistakes. God is trying to show them what they should be doing. Our best guess is that somehow they fell—probably due to pride. We can guess this because this is what happened to Lucifer, whom we call Satan.

*“He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.”
(1 Tim. 3:6)*

Satan, we assume a part of that council, fell due to pride. That probably happened with most of these council members. Thus, God is looking to replace them—these divine council members. He is looking to replace the divine council because they fell due to pride. They’re ruling unjustly.

This helps us answer why God is looking for a bride! God is looking to replace the divine council with a bride for His Son. That is what this life is about. That is why these tryouts are taking place here on this earth.

*God is Looking to Replace
the Divine Council
with a Bride for His Son.*

God gives us a glimpse of this in Scripture:

So, he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: ‘the four great beasts are four great kings that will rise from the earth. But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.’ (Daniel 7:15-18)

The holy people of the Most High...that means you and me! This refers to those of us who finish strong to be a part of the bride of Christ. We will inherit/possess the kingdom...forever! That is God’s plan and goal for eternity future: we are ruling and reigning over the universe in His governing council. That is our destiny. That is what God created you for!

Talk about purpose. Talk about meaning. Talk about significance. Talk about love. You are full of purpose, meaning, significance, and love. Like the love that a husband has for a wife (not the imperfect struggling marriages these days)—but a perfect love; that is what it is going to be in heaven: perfect love from Jesus

to us the bride.

How can we get depressed if we know all of this is happening? Your eternal destiny is incredible!! You are full of worth, you are full of significance, and you are full of purpose. Meditate on that for 30 days!!!

But, some might ask, “As the bride, could we become corrupt like them?” The answer is no.

Let us look at some of the differences between the divine council and us (who will become a part of the bride) according to Ezekiel 28:12 - 15:

- They started out full of wisdom. (We had to learn it.)
- They started out perfect in beauty. (We started out as babies and grew into it.)
- They started in God’s government right from the beginning because they had positions of authority and governing. (We will have to earn it—wait for a future book that will talk about this.)
- They started out blameless. (We started out sinful.)

In some ways we are total opposites. They have it now but are going to lose the right to be a part of God’s divine council whereas we get to gain it and have it forever. Their leadership is temporary; ours will be eternal.

There will also be one thing that will make us totally different from those in the divine council. *We will know mercy and grace. They never have.* With that knowledge of mercy and grace, we will be able to govern and rule effectively forever as the bride of Christ and never fall because we started in a fallen state.

God gave us mercy; He gave us grace. Once we experience His mercy and grace, we never want to go backward.

Some may be wondering, “Why can’t those in the divine council repent?” That is a great question. Unfortunately, that answer actually comes out in a much later video. (If you want to know quickly, see my book, *Why?*)

But for now, focus on this: Your goal as a believer is to mature as a believer.

Do not lose sight of this. Take in the Word. Be disciplined. Run after God. Thirst and hunger for God. Salvation is merely a stepping stone to something bigger and far greater: ruling and

reigning with Christ as co-laborer as a part of a new divine council.

This is not new to God. Why He wants a divine council, I do not know, but He has it and works with it and He is looking for a new one. He is looking for a new divine council to rule and reign over the universe.

CHAPTER FIVE

Why does God test us?

In order to understand this big question of “why does God test us?” I want to introduce you to another author. His name is Randy Alcorn. I read one of his books and I want to recommend it to you. The book is simply titled, *Heaven*. (This is the second book you need to read after the Bible—it gets you so excited about what God is doing.) In this book, Alcorn also communicates this idea of ruling and reigning with God forever in eternity future, but he calls it a family business. He derives the “family” part from the book of John:

But to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)

You and I are children of God. We are in the family of God, so Alcorn explains that God has a family business. That family business is ruling and reigning over the universe for all eternity future.

God’s family is not made up of one specific people group; there are going to be people from every tribe and language and from all around the world. This family is going to be made up of people from South Africa, Uganda, Europe, India, Peru, and North America, just to name a few places. God’s family is diverse ethnically.

As with any family business, you don’t promote a child before they prove themselves worthy to take over a specific position. Your ten-year old son or daughter is not going to be the CEO because they are too young. They need to be trained and prove themselves.

This is the same with us and being a part of the Bride of Christ—part of his ruling concil. We don’t get it simply by “praying a prayer.”

This therefore helps us understand why God tests us. He has a plan for us in eternity future and before He promotes us, He wants to test us and see how we are doing here on this earth. (As I was teaching this to some couples, one woman said, “So this is really just one long job interview,” and in many ways, she’s right.)

In understanding this principle, let's discover two key points to help us understand why God tests us.

The first point is this: There are different levels of authority in heaven right now, and there will be different levels of authority in heaven in eternity future. Let's find out how we know there are different levels in heaven now.

Not all the angels and Elohim are the same. In the book of Daniel, Daniel received a vision and wondered what it meant. An angel was dispatched to give him an answer. We read this angel's words in Daniel 10:

Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me for twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. (Daniel 10:12-14)

This angel was sent to answer Daniel's prayers, but he encountered a road block: the prince of Persia. This prince was one of the bad guys; we may call him a demon. This demon would not allow the angel sent to Daniel to proceed. The angel had to call on Michael, a "chief prince", for help so that he could go and talk to Daniel.

This passage enables us to see that there are different levels among the authorities in heaven. The angel sent to answer Daniel's prayers had the lowest ranking of the three. After that came the prince of Persia and above him was Michael, the chief prince.

Now, Michael is an archangel. An archangel is defined as an angel that is over other angels. (In some church denominations, there are archbishops; these archbishops hold higher authority and oversee the bishops who are the next level of authority in the church structure.) However, even Michael had someone over him. We find this in Jude's book.

But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you." (Jude 9)



Here, even Michael, the archangel, will not contend with the devil. The devil, or Lucifer, ranks above Michael in power. So here, we see there are at least four different levels of authority in heaven. So, will it be in all of eternity future.

Different Levels in Eternity Future

In the book of Luke, Jesus told the parable of the ten minas. This parable adds to the idea that there will be different levels in heaven in eternity future—just like there are now!

A king was going away and gave money to each of his servants to do business until he returned. When he returns, each gives a report of what he did with the king's money (minas).

The first came before him, saying, “Lord, your mina has made ten minas more. And he said to him, “Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.” (Luke 19:16-17)

In eternity future, there will be people who will be over other people. Some will be in charge of entire cities. This means there will be those in authority and those under authority.

So we see the allocation of authority/responsibility right now in the heavenly realms and we will also see this same concept in eternity future. There will be different levels of authority for all eternity.

You Don't Start at The Top

The second point is pretty self-evident, but I'm going to address it anyhow: We do not start at the top of the family business.

Just like here on the earth, when you first start working in a business, you start at the bottom. You may start off as a janitor,

and as the leadership sees your faithfulness, you move up from there, but still at a much lower position. If leadership sees your faithfulness there, you get promoted again. As this continues, you can eventually reach to the top—but you don't start there!

God is the same. He wants to see if you are going to be faithful in the little things. If you are faithful in the little things, He will put you in middle management. If you are faithful there, He will put you in upper management and if you are faithful there, He is going to make you a partner. You will be able to sit with Jesus on His throne and rule and reign.

Through this parable, God is basically saying, “I want to see your faithfulness. I want to see how you are going to do before I promote you.”

This is what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:

Moreover, it is required that those who have been given a trust prove faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:2)

Before I understood rewards, I thought, “Something is required of me as a Christian? But I prayed the prayer and I am going to heaven; nothing is required of me.” (Remember how I told you that before I understood this material there were many passages that just didn't make sense? Well, this was one of them. Now it makes total sense.)

What is required of us is faithfulness. This faithfulness is not for getting into heaven. Faith is required for that—and there is a difference between the two. Faithfulness is required to be promoted in the “family business.”

Personally, I run a non-profit organization. It is like a small business. I have hired and fired people. When I hire them, I want to see their resume. I want to see what experience they have in the area where I am hoping to hire them. If they don't have experience, I'm not going to hire them.

Now, if I were God (and praise the Lord I'm not!) and someone came to me and said, “I would like to rule and reign over your kingdom,” but their resume was blank, I would be pretty skeptical. I would not put them in a position of authority. I would reply, “You have not shown anything on your resume. How do I know that you are going to be faithful in doing what I am going to ask you to do?”

God is asking us here on this earth to prepare our resumes (CV for most of the world). We get approximately eighty years here on earth to prove our faithfulness to God. In looking for

your faithfulness, He is saying, “I want to see your faithfulness in marriage, raising your children, how you take care of your pet, and how you do at your job, etc. I am not going to put an unskilled person in charge of my kingdom. I put you on this earth to see how you are going to do. I gave you talents and a manual (the Bible) on how to do be faithful. I want proof.”

Children get toy tractors. They do not get the real tractors that do the real work. If you haven't shown yourself to be faithful, you're going to end up with a toy tractor.

You might know some Christians who are like children. They are immature—believers, yes, but immature believers. The Scriptures teach us this and the writer of Hebrews understood this:



For though, by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. (Hebrews 5:12-13)

Even in the early days of the gospel spreading, there were immature believers.

That's why Paul said to the Colossians (Colossians 1:28-29) that he strives to make everyone mature in Christ which means that some are immature. I'm trying to help you to see that immature believers (children) receive toy tractors. They are at the bottom of the company (family business); they are not in leadership roles because they haven't proven themselves to be faithful.

Paul saw this in his own life; he explained that he gave up his childish ways to mature and that is what he wants us to do.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. (1 Corinthians 13:11)

“I gave up childish ways.” Paul grew into maturity. God is telling us through the Apostle Paul that He wants us to give up

childish ways—to mature.

I want this to be a loving “smack” in the face if you don’t already know it: We can know the Lord after having prayed a prayer, but we can still be just a child. We can still be very immature. God wants us to grow, become mature, disciple others, and reflect his glory in every area of our lives.

God Demands Much

Jesus helps us to understand why in Luke 12

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (Luke 12:48b)

God is essentially saying, I have entrusted you with much. How are you doing with what I have given you? In other words, God tests us. God tests us here on this earth to see how we are doing with what He has given us. Are we mature? Will we use it wisely?

Before I knew about rewards, I would have said, “That does not seem to be what a loving God would do.” When I see what the actual rewards are, though, it makes total sense. Yes, before I get to sit on the throne with Jesus, much will be demanded of me.

A Just God

Another reason a loving God tests and disciplines His children is because God is a God of justice. Look at Deuteronomy 32:4:

The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is he. (Deuteronomy 32:4)

All of God’s ways are just (there is not injustice with God). Whatever God does—even in testing us—is just.

And never forget that the justice of God is inseparably linked to the love of God. We cannot separate the two: His love and His justice go hand in hand with one another. Yes, He is a God of love (1 John 4:8), but He is also a just God. We see this in Isaiah 30:18:

“Therefore the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have the compassion on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for him.”

God longs to be gracious to you; He longs to have compassion for you, but He is a God of justice. You cannot separate the two—even though many Christians would love to do that.

Although He loves the sinner and can have a relationship with the sinner, God says, I love you but I am still a just God. For you to be My bride, I want to see faithfulness.

Now, here is what happens in the church around the world. Christians tend to focus only on God's love. We know that God is a God of love from John.

...God is love. (1 John 4:8^b)

This is what most Christians focus on—God's love—but we forget about His justice. We want to know His love and assume that all of His love covers anything bad we do. God won't be unjust to us. He gave us His Son; won't He freely give us all things (Romans 8:32)?

Though this does apply to our relationship with God, it does not apply to our rewards and position in the family business. Getting into heaven is unconditionally based on faith, but getting rewards is conditionally based on works. The two are very different.

With regard to this justice, though we want grace for ourselves all the time, when someone is not just to us, we want God to act. We want Him to punish that person to bring about justice for us! That is when we want to see the justice of God.

But, if we are not just toward God (not faithful with the gifts He has given us), then we just want grace and mercy. He is a God of love, grace, and mercy. "He would never discipline me when I'm not faithful. That's just not who God is," we think to ourselves. We delight in God's justice to others who have offended us, but when we have offended God, we want grace.

Testing in The Bible

God is just and He says there will be testing. We see it in the very beginning of the Bible:

Now it came about after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering..." (Genesis 22:1-2)

God tested Abraham with his son! Yes, God tests us in all areas—even with our children. So many Christians give everything to God—except their kids. God says, No, I want everything.

This testing can be for a very long period of time. In fact, it can even go on for decades. This is what happened to the Israelites.

“You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that he might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.”
(Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

These Israelites were tested for forty years. And even then, they did not learn the lesson!

Men and women, I am crying out to you: learn the lesson! Learn to pass the tests to get from lower management to middle management to upper management. Pass your test; do not be like the Exodus generation that had to wander around for forty years but never learned their lesson.

Humble yourself under the almighty hand of God and he will exalt you in the proper time (1 Peter 5:6).

Even the Ten Commandments are for this purpose. Right after giving the Ten Commandments, Moses says this to the people:

Moses said to the people,

“Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you so that you may not sin.” (Exodus 20:20)

The Ten Commandments are a test. Are we going to keep them? Are we going to obey them or are we going to go our own way? If we go our own way, we are sinning. When we sin, we are not faithful, and that means we are not going to get the reward that God wants for us. God is going to test us so that He can reward us.

Sometimes God will put us in difficult circumstances just to test us. This is what He did with the people of Israel as they went through the desert on their way to the Promised Land. As they went through, they realized their supplies ran out so they cried out to God for food. God supplied them with food, but it was all a test.

In the wilderness, He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that he might humble and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. (Deuteronomy 8:16)

Test you? Yes, to see if you believed in the goodness of God. To do good for you in the end? What good? Ruling and reigning—these are good and BIG.

The Scriptures are full of indications that God tests us.

The Lord examines the righteous. (Psalms 11:5)

God is constantly testing our hearts. Why? God has got a plan for all eternity future; He wants to know how He is going to put you in that plan.

In Zechariah 13, history records that Israel had been very rebellious as a nation. Here, God is disciplining them. Two-thirds die by the sword, or perish by famine or a plague; one third survives and is taken to other nations. God says this about the surviving third:

*“This third I will put into the fire and refine them like gold. I will refine them like silver and test them like gold.”
(Zechariah 13:9)*

Think about those words, “refine them like silver and gold.” How is silver and gold refined?

When silver or gold is purified (refined), the metalworker makes the fire so hot that the dross (the impurities) rises to the top. He then wipes off that dross and then makes the fire hotter so that more dross rises to the top. This keeps happening until finally there is no more dross and the silversmith or the goldsmith can see his reflection in the silver or the gold.

When God can see His reflection in your character, that is when the fire calms down. But until then, God says, I am going to purify you like silver and gold because I want to see My reflection in you. Then I will know that you are faithful, and that is when I can reward you and allow you to rule and reign with Me forever. That is His primary goal.

If we are serious about wanting all that God has for us in eternity future, we should say, “God test and try me.”

*Test me, Lord, and try me. Examine my heart and my mind...
(Psalm 26:2)*

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)

I hope you can say in your heart (as I have said for years), “I invite you, God, test me. Try me. Break me. Make me the person of God you want me to be.”

New Testament Testing

All of these Scriptures on testing that we’ve looked at have been

from the Old Testament. Is testing covered in the New Testament?
Yes.

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)

James knew we would come under trial and that that trial would be a test. The result of withstanding the test? We will receive a crown. Rulers get crowns. People who sit on thrones get crowns.

That is about rewards, ruling, and reigning with Christ on the throne. We are going to go through trials and testing. A person who perseveres under trial will get the reward at the end; it is all worth it!!

Peter understood it, too.

These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith— of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:7)

Your faith is going to be refined by fire. God is the same today, yesterday, and forever. How He treated his people in the Old Testament He also treats us in the New Testament. It is all for the same common goal...to get us to rule and reign with Christ forever! Don't miss out or pass it by!

Stand firm. Persevere.

Peter goes on:

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” (1 Peter 4:12)

Testing is not strange. Testing has always been God's plan and it will be a part of God's plan. Why?

He is shooting for the ultimate goal to have you rule and reign with Him. He has a family business and He wants to see where to place you. Salvation was merely a stepping stone to His ultimate goal.

Remember the parable in Luke 19:11-15. When Jesus left this earth, He gave us gifts and talents (Ephesians 4:8). He is now sitting next to God, His Father. He will come back and when He does, He will want to see how we did with what He gave us. I gave you the money, how did you do?

Let's look again at the parable:

"But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.' He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for his servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it." (Luke 19:14,15)

The king wants to know how they did with what he entrusted to them. Why? Because he wants to reward them.

"The first one came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned ten more.' " "Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter take charge of ten cities.' (Luke 19:16-17)

Ten cities? Literal cities? Yes, it makes a lot more sense when you take this in the context of ruling and reigning and sitting on a throne.

The next one was given charge over five cities. One got ten, and one got five—note the different levels of being in charge. This is again communicating that there are different levels of ruling, and reigning. We will not all get the same thing.

Ultimate Testing

The Scriptures have shown us that God tests us here on earth. However, they also tell us that our testing is not only here on the earth, but also on Judgment day.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

"We" refers to every Christian. Every Christian is going to be judged before the judgment seat of Christ. Christ is going to be asking, "How did you do with what I gave you?"

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)

Judgment day is the final big test—not of whether we are going to heaven, that is totally different—but of how we are going to be rewarded.

If you have gold, silver, or precious stones—in other words, you are living to advance God's kingdom, not your own kingdom—then you are going to be rewarded because fire does not do anything to those gold, silver, or precious stones; it just purifies them.

But if you are living for your own kingdom, not God's kingdom, everything is going to be burned up and you will have nothing left. You will be in heaven, but you will have no rewards.

Neither you nor I want that for you. God doesn't want that for you either.

Please, please catch the big picture. You have been chosen by God to rule and reign with Him. You are full of significance, full of purpose, and full of God. This God has a plan for your life for all eternity future, but you do not start at the top. Praying the prayer does not get you to the top; you have to be proven faithful.

God has a family business. He is going to test us to see where He is going to put us in His family business. Show yourself to be faithful—for it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

CHAPTER SIX

How Does This Affect Your Day-To-Day Life?

We saw in Ephesians 2: 6-7 that this is first and foremost about what God gets to do. God's goal is to live out and show off His grace for all eternity. He is going to do that by taking a bride for His Son. He wants a mature bride—and He will get one.

He will do that by bringing people out of sin, saving and testing them. For those who passed the test, He will allow them to be with His Son to rule and reign forever.

Please understand this crucial, important concept: this is first and foremost about what God gets to do. It is not about us.

But, for God to fulfill His goal, you need to mature as a believer. That is why we are here on this earth. Our goal is to mature. Our salvation is merely a stepping stone to something far bigger and greater and that is to rule and to reign with Christ throughout eternity. That is why we are here.

Oh, how different this is from simply “praying a prayer” and then thinking that everything is good. Some pastors have said, “As long as you get to heaven, everything will be okay.”

In essence they are saying, “You need some fire insurance (avoiding hell) by praying that prayer.” What does that mean for people here on the earth? Well, Christianity then becomes about sin management. Do not do all the bad things while here on this earth. (It's probably best.)

Dear reader, I am here to tell you that is not what the Scriptures are telling us. Christianity is not primarily about sin management. Let's find out where we learn this.

In Matthew 16 Jesus said:

*“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
(Matthew 16:18)*



Think about a gate. What is its purpose? Its purpose is to keep people out. Gates are defensive. If the gates of hell are defensive and will not prevail against the church, then one has to conclude that the church is to be on the offensive. If the church is one the offensive, that doesn't agree with simply sin management (not doing the don'ts).

There is something far more important than simply not doing the don'ts. Sin management is not going to get you to the throne. The church needs to be on the offensive when taking on the gates of hell.

An offensive example from Scripture is found in 2 Samuel 23:

"There was also Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, a valiant warrior from Kabzeel. He did many heroic deeds, which included killing two champions of Moab. Another time, on a snowy day, he chased the lion down into a pit and killed it." (2 Samuel 23:20-21)

Hmmm...here is a five-hundred-pound lion versus perhaps a two-hundred-pound man, and the man is chasing the lion. Now, I have heard of lion tamers, but I have never heard of a lion chaser. This guy was radical.

What happened to this brave lion chaser? Benaiah became David's captain of the king's body guard (2 Samuel 23:23). However, Benaiah lived long after David. After David died, he continued working under the leadership of Solomon, David's son and successor.

King Solomon made him commander of the army (1 Kings 2:35,

4:4). Solomon gave him a huge promotion because Benaiah had a strong resume. Strong resumes earn strong promotions. We see it in the Scriptures and we see it in how the corporate world works as well.

Your goal as a believer is to build your resume, your CV—to mature. God wants to present a mature bride to His Son, the King of kings. And this has everything to do with your day-to-day life.

Differentiate Between Recorded and Rewarded

Before we talk about how this affects your day-to-day life, two things need to be very clear.

First, there is a difference between having your named recorded in heaven and being rewarded in heaven. Recorded is by faith and rewarded is by works.

I want to be sure you are very clear on this. I am not saying that having your name recorded in heaven is “faith plus works.” I believe in sola fide, which means ‘faith alone’. The only thing that gets your name recorded in heaven is faith alone in Jesus Christ. It is not ‘faith plus works’.

I was speaking at a Chinese mission convention in Los Angeles years ago to about three thousand people and one man came up to the leader of the convention. He said, “Hey, that man is talking about faith plus works and he is wrong.”

The leader looked at him and said, “You were not listening to the message. He is not talking about faith plus works. He is saying that faith is what gets you into heaven. Works is what earns you rewards and the two are very different.”

When I speak about having your name recorded in heaven (being saved), it is by faith alone.

The second thing is: *God loves you unconditionally and steadfastly no matter what your resume looks like.*

Sarah Young’s book, Jesus Calling, points this out so well in her April 19th devotion:

“I love you regardless of how well you are performing. Sometimes you feel uneasy wondering if you are doing enough to be worthy of My Love. No matter how exemplary your behavior, the answer to that question will always be no. Your performance and My Love are totally different issues that you need to sort out. I love you...without limits or conditions.”

Whether you are at the bottom, in middle management, in upper

management, or whether you are a partner, you have 100% of God's love—always. That will never change!

So, let's differentiate between His love and your performance. In this series, I'm focusing on performance: maturing to reign. That has nothing to do with God's love for you. God's love is 100% steadfast; it will always be there.

There is nothing you can do to get God to love you any more or any less. That is why it is called unconditional love. God loves you unconditionally no matter what your resume looks like, no matter how your works are, no matter how you'll be rewarded.

Moving On

Okay, with those two points hopefully settled, let's move on to day-to-day life. Everything I'm talking to you about should affect your day-to-day life. I believe that because of what Apostle Paul writes:

Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:2)

We've looked at this once, but let's look at it again from a different angle.

There is a huge difference between faith and faithfulness. When we talk about faith, it means having your name recorded in heaven, whereas faithfulness is talking about being rewarded in heaven. Faith versus faithfulness—the two are very different.

When Paul says it is required of the stewards that they may be found faithful, he means if you want to become a part of the bride of Christ, you have to be faithful. In other words, you need to build up your resume.

*The Primary Goal of Christianity
is not Simply to get to Heaven,
but to be Faithful in order to Rule
and Reign with Christ as
His Bride.*

I've said it before but I'll say it again for the sake of emphasis. The primary goal of Christianity is not simply to get into heaven, but to be faithful in order to be prepared to rule and reign with Christ as His bride. God's ultimate goal for

you and me is to have us rule and reign with His Son. He wants us to build our resume. Salvation is merely a stepping stone to something far bigger and greater; ruling and reigning with His Son.

We find this explained in the parable of the talents. Although it looks very similar to the parable of the minas, it is different and is

seeking to teach us a different lesson; the need to be faithful with the different talents we've been given.

In this parable, the master gives out talents; to one he gives out five, to another he gives two, and to another one. He then he goes away and says I am going to come back and see how you used the talents I gave you. We find this parable in Matthew 25:

“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.” (Matthew 25:14-15)

Unlike the parable of the minas, in this parable they all had different talents. The master goes away and then comes back and says, “I want to see how you did with the talents I gave you.

“Then after a long time, the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.” (Matthew 25:19)

“Settled accounts with them” is what I would call judgment day. On the final judgment day, the master wants to see how his servants did and determine their faithfulness to his kingdom—so he can know how to reward them—where to place them in his family business.

How did they do?

“And the one who received five talents said, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.’

The master said, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:21)

Note that this servant was faithful. This wasn't about his faith—it was about his faithfulness.

And he was faithful over “a little!” Those words are key. What God gave us here on this earth is nothing compared to what you and I are going to experience in eternity ruling over the universe. What we have here on this earth is just a little. But God promises that because you are faithful over a little, he will set you over much—all because of faithfulness.

In the two parables that seem almost exactly the same, the concern is over faithfulness—not faith. If we are faithful on the

earth, we are going to rule and reign with Christ over the universe.

If you are faithful, God is going to give you more. We are to work on our faithfulness and building a resume. This has everything to do with our day-to-day lives. You and I want to be faithful to God, both in the big areas and the small areas of our lives.

Faithfulness ≠ Sin Management

I want to remind you again because repetition is always helpful! Faithfulness is very different from sin management. If we just focus on sin management, what does it mean to be faithful in the big areas? We won't be. This is not just about sin management. It is not simply about the "don'ts":

- Don't cheat on taxes.
- Don't be unfaithful in marriage.
- Don't push the limits in dating; be holy in your behavior and choices.
- Don't steal or take credit from your company/business.
- Don't lie.
- Don't be self-centered or arrogant.
- Don't yell/scream at your child or abuse a child.
- Don't walk away in anger and never make amends.

All of the above are sin management. We shouldn't be doing those things, but this should not be our focus.

What about building your resume? What about doing good things?

- Are you discipling your family?
- Are you pouring your life into your kids or are you waiting for the youth pastor to do that? (Do not expect the youth pastor to disciple your children. That is your job not his.)
- What about volunteering in a nursing home or loving on people who feel lonely, empty, and think people have abandoned them?
- Maybe you want to be a foster parent and help a child who desperately needs someone to love, care, and guide them. (My wife had our kids go and tutor in the city. They would go down to the inner city of Richmond and they would tutor

students. My daughters loved doing this and got a vision of what they wanted to do. One of my daughters said she wanted to be a teacher because she tutored in the inner city.)

- Maybe you want to do some evangelism and go out on the streets and share the word of God one on one.
- Maybe you want to go overseas and draw wells for a community that has no water.
- If you are in the medical field, go on a mercy ship with Operation Mobilization and help people who otherwise have no chance of getting life-changing surgeries.
- Maybe you want to go overseas to live and get a job and love people in other cultures in order to share Jesus with them.

In both the big and small areas, God wants our faithfulness.

“And he said to him,

“And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities [much].’” (Luke 19:17)

Faithful in the very little; this has everything to do with our day-to-day lives and how we live our lives every moment of every day. God is looking for a mature bride for His Son. I encourage you to be a lion chaser.

God is not looking for people who just do sin management. He wants lion chasers because we are going to be ruling and reigning over the universe with His Son. That means we need to be on the offensive. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church. You need to mature as a believer.

I encourage you to build your resume because your salvation is just a stepping stone to something far bigger ...something far greater.



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CHAPTER SEVEN

The Formula for Ruling and Reigning

God has given us a formula in His word for ruling and reigning. It is not overt. It does not jump off at the page at you. In fact, the four words in the formula, which will be given later in this chapter, are not put together on any of the pages of the Bible, but once you understand the principle, it is everywhere!

We are going to find that formula for ruling and reigning, the formula for building your resume. This formula includes four simple words that I hope will ‘blow your mind away’. Read on to discover what those words are.

This formula is very different from what average Christians thinks about how they are to live their life. Many think this way, “I go to church every Sunday and I prayed the prayer; the rest of the week is mine. I am not going to do some radical obedience.”

The average Christians thinks this way because they think Jesus is already preparing mansions for them; they do not see the reason why should they do this radical obedience. They believe this because in John 14, Jesus stated:

“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you.” (John 14:2)



These Christians think, I have a mansion waiting up in heaven for me. It is like a resort. I am going to have a pool, find some chairs for all my friends, lots of extra bedrooms for people, a huge kitchen—so it is going to be fantastic.

So radical obedience? I not going to worry about making my mansion bigger. I am content with what I have. When I think of how much it costs, the price to be paid is way too much for this radical obedience. I already get a mansion; I am good.

I am here to challenge the thinking that simply because you prayed “the prayer” you are going to get a mansion. People seem to get confused at first because there seem to be conflicting passages in Scripture about this promise.

But store for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6:20)

That is a command. Store for yourselves treasures in heaven. It sounds very self-serving.

However, in Luke 9, we read the following:

“Then he said to them all, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up the cross daily and follow Me.’” (Luke 9:23)

In the days of Jesus, when you picked up the cross it only meant one thing—you were going to die. Crosses were punishment for criminals, and they died on the cross.

So, here, on one hand, you are supposed to “store up” for yourself (which sounds a little self-centered) and then on the other hand, he says to pick up your cross and die to yourself. So, which one is it? Are supposed to store up treasures for ourselves or are we supposed to die to ourselves?

Power, Possessions and Pleasure

We are going to answer that question. Though these verses seem to contradict themselves, they actually do not. We will find the answer in understanding how Satan tempted Jesus and Eve. Now there are three key areas where Satan tempted Jesus and Eve: power, possessions, and pleasure. (All of this teaching came from Randy Alcorn. It is powerful!)

Let’s begin with Jesus. In Matthew:

*“The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’”
(Matthew 4:3)*

Why did Satan tempt Jesus with bread? Jesus had fasted for the last forty days prior to this encounter, so He was hungry and thirsty. Satan was telling Jesus to satisfy His earthly, fleshly nature; thus, the devil is tempting Him in the area of pleasure.

Then the devil took Him to the holy city and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple.

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you and they will lift you up lest you strike your foot against a stone,’ said the tempter.” (Matthew 4:5-6)

He will command his angels—this means Satan was telling Jesus to be in the position of leadership. Leadership means power. Satan was tempting Him to call upon His power and authority—but it didn’t stop there.

Then the devil took Him to a very high mountain. Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor and he said,

“I will give these to you if you will fall down and worship me.” (Matthew 4:9)

Because God had allowed Satan charge over the kingdoms of this earth (John 14:30), he said to Jesus that he would give Jesus those kingdoms if He would just kneel and worship him. He tempted Jesus with possessions.

Jesus was tempted in the areas of pleasure, power, and possessions.

Now let’s switch over to the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3 we see these same three temptations in a different way:

*“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food...”
(Genesis 3:6)*

Hmmm, food—that looks delicious. Food that would satisfy her physical body. Satan was tempting Eve with pleasure.

The verse continues:

“...and it was a delight to her eyes” (Genesis 3:6).

Eve liked the apple and then desired to have the whole tree. That is tempting her in the area of possessions.

The verse finished with:

“And that tree was to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6)

Thus, Eve was tempted to gain wisdom. Wisdom brings power. That was the third area.

So, Satan also tempted Eve in the area of power, possessions, and pleasure.

Key Question

Here is the key question: Did Satan tempt their human nature or their sinful nature?

Think about this for a moment. Did Satan tempt their human nature or their sinful nature? The answer will be very clear once you see it, but until then, it can be puzzling.

It had to be their human nature because at this time Eve hadn't sinned yet—and Jesus never sinned. What that implies is mind-boggling!

Satan tempted their human nature. So what does this teach us? What do we learn from these passages?

God Put Inside our Human Nature a Desire for Power, Possessions and Pleasure.

God put inside our human nature a desire for power, possessions, and pleasure. Let me repeat that because it is so powerful. God put inside our human nature

a desire for power, a desire for possessions and a desire for pleasure!!!

Satan didn't do that. God did, and what it means is this:

- God wants you to have power. He designed you to want to have power.
- God wants you to have possessions. He designed you to have possessions.
- God wants you to have pleasure. That's what He designed your physical body for.

But, wait. He says we are supposed to die to ourselves. In wanting power, possessions and pleasure, aren't we basically living

for ourselves? Doesn't that oppose what Jesus taught us about dying to ourselves?

Resolving The Conflict

How do we resolve this issue—this conflict? There is a very easy way to resolve this; by studying the responses to and the results of the temptations.

Let's start with Jesus. Jesus said, "No," three times by quoting Scripture. Eve said "yes." What resulted from what they did?

Eve's ending didn't look very good.

So the Lord God banished him (them) from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. (Genesis 3:23)

Eve and Adam ate the fruit. The result was sin which brought about broken fellowship which brought about banishment. They were kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

What happened to Jesus when he said "no" three times?

After he provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Hebrews 1:3)

And in Philippians 2, Paul wrote:

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11)

By saying no, Jesus now rules and reigns forever.

What do we learn from this? There is a huge significant lesson in looking at these accounts. The answer gives us the "formula" for gaining power, possessions, and pleasure. The formula for ruling and reigning is found in four words.

Deny Now, Gain Later.

In other words, God is saying, "I am quite happy with you getting power, possessions and pleasure, but I want to see *when* you want it.



I am giving you a choice. You can attain power, possessions, and pleasure while here on this earth for about eighty to ninety years OR you can have power,

possessions, and pleasure that will last forever. It is your choice.

Do you want your power, possessions, and pleasures here on this earth or do you want them forever in eternity future?



Denying Now

What does it look like if you are going to deny power? Denying power says, “Lord, I know I can do things in my own power, in my own strength, but I’m going to say ‘no’ and get down on my knees and pray. I’m going to say I am depending upon You to make this happen; I am dependent on You to bring about results. Oh God, I need You to make things happen.”

Denying power means I am going to be 100% dependent upon God. I am going to get on my knees and pray.

Choosing to deny oneself goes beyond that though.

- God says if you are a leader and you deny the power, this is what I want from you—I want you to be a servant leader. I want you to lead by serving those you lead.
- If you are a husband, I want to serve your wife in all the ways of life.
- If you are a father, I want you to serve your children and be a servant father.

I want you to deny your power now, here on this earth.

How do we deny possessions?

- We can give away our money. Let’s be writing checks and draining our savings to help out other people. Right now, maybe you can only start with giving away 3%. That’s okay, just do it cheerfully! Then as you earn more money, maybe

you can increase to 10%, and then from 10% to 20% of your money. Eventually, you can be giving away 50% of your income.

To do that, you have to keep a check on your focus. Instead of saying, “Hey, I am going to get a nice expensive sports car” you choose to say, “let me get a less expensive vehicle which serves the same purpose.” Then you’ll be able to be more generous. You would save a lot of money and then you can give away more.

How do you deny pleasure? Many times, it is in the area of fasting.

- Maybe it is fasting food: burgers, fries, pancakes. It might be fasting for one meal a day or two meals a day or up to forty days.
- For some people, however, fasting is not about avoiding food. For some men, it might be fasting golf. They get more joy out of golf than they get spending time with God.
- Maybe some women need to fast shopping. They spend hours shopping, but always lack time to spend with God.
- For others it should be their social media. They need to get away from how others view them on the internet.
- For others, it may be your phone in general.

John Piper says, “Fast whatever satisfies you more than God.” I love that. If there is something that satisfies you more than God (golf, shopping social media, etc.) fast that.

Deny pleasure.

Deny now, gain later: power, possessions, and pleasure. Deny power—God I am dependent on you through prayer. Deny possessions—I going to be giving things away. Deny pleasures—I’m going to be fasting.

Wow, look at those three words: prayer, giving and fasting. These are the three basic tenants of the Christian life. If we do these things, we are maturing and building our resumes. We are working toward the goal of being a part of God’s bride for his Son.

Warning!

Be careful—because the opposite is also true. What is the opposite of deny now, gain later?

Gain Now, Deny Later.

Gain all the power, possessions, and pleasures you can here on this earth for eighty to ninety years but lose forever the right to rule and reign with Christ.

I do not want that for you or anyone. You do not want that for you; you want to gain whatever you can get for all eternity.

Now this teaching may seem to go against what John tells us in 1 John 2:

For everything in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life comes not from the Father but from the world. (1 John 2:16)

But wanting power, possessions and pleasure for all eternity does not go against what John is saying here. He is saying to want power, possessions, and pleasures here on earth is from this world, but to want it for all eternity future—that is from God.

In essence, he is basically saying, “If you gain it now in the world, you will lose it forever.”

God put it in your human nature to want power, possessions, and pleasure, but the formula for getting it is to deny it now and gain it later. That is what God wants for you and for me. Live for Eternity. Live with an eternal mindset and perspective.

Remember, 99.999999% of your existence happens after you die. What you do here on earth determines how you exist forever. Deny now, gain later. Build your resume and mature as a believer. Build your resume by denying now and gaining later. Salvation is a stepping stone for something BIG: ruling and reigning with Christ.

Epilogue:

Congratulations on finishing the first book in the “Maturing the Bride” series. Please know that this is just the tip of the iceberg. So much more is coming.

For now, practice what you have learned. Deny now so you can gain later! And please know that you will never really “know” this material until you can teach it. So I encourage you, go out and find two other people you can teach this to!

Our next series is “One Degree Off.” It challenges us to see that the church has been “one degree off” for nearly two thousand years.

Please don’t miss this series!