

# Being the Bride of Christ: How You Can Relate

by Jason Chatraw



It's interesting how our culture shapes – or in most instances, misshapes – how we view concepts in the Bible. As a kid, when I first heard that Christians are to be the bride of Christ, I had a hard time understanding how being a bride related to my life. Me in a white dress, holding flowers with a veil and a train? Wearing a dress for Key Club initiations in high school was traumatic enough for me, but being the bride of Christ? The idea of being someone's bride was completely foreign to me.

## **Battling our preconceived ideas**

The Gospel of John says the church is to be the bride of Christ collectively and that we are His bride on an individual level. But as a single woman or man, how do we process that concept?

"I don't think you can mentally picture it in the culture in which we live," says Matt Wilson, a voice communications planner from Atlanta. "As a guy that means, 'This is weird. Me? As a female?' But the way I look at it as a single guy is that I think about my future wife: Where is she? What's she doing? A lot of times, I'll pray for her, not even knowing who she is, so that when that day comes, she and I will both be pure. Christ wants His Father to prepare us and protect us."

"As a guy, it's hard to process because I always think of 'bride' in the female sense," says Brian Roberson, a youth pastor from St. Simons Island, Georgia. "I know the Bible is talking about waiting for the bridegroom, but the whole concept of marriages and weddings isn't something guys talk about all the time like women do."

"One of the biggest challenges for men in understanding how we are the bride of Christ is learning how to receive God's love for us," says Kris McDaniel, a pastor from Atlanta who leads a service for young adults called Vineyard Sunday Night. "As men, we're trained to be the givers of love. The key for us is to understand how to be embraced and loved by God, yet that seems to be a big stretch for us at times."

For a woman who has never been a bride, the concept can be challenging but more concrete.

"To be the bride of Christ is the fulfillment of the romance you always wanted," says Kim Fleek, a physicians assistant student at Emory University. "It's the fulfillment of your dreams. You have somebody who is given completely to you. The thought of being the bride of Christ means there is someone who can totally consume me – and all my passions and desires can go toward loving Him."

Whether you're a single woman or man, attempting to place yourself in an unknown or incomprehensible experience is difficult. And understanding the concept of being the bride of Christ within the pretenses of our culture can be nearly impossible.

To fully understand what the Bible is talking about when it tells us that Christians will be the bride of Christ, we need to transport ourselves back 2,000 years to Jerusalem so we can grasp the context of the Jewish culture.

### **A year and seven days**

The Jewish wedding process started with an agreement between two fathers, one deciding to allow his daughter to marry the other's son. In a public ceremony, the couple announced their intentions to get married, initiating the betrothal period.

This betrothal period lasted approximately a year, during which the groom returned to his father's house and began preparing a room for his new bride. Following completion of the room, a priest inspected the room to ensure it was better than the current living conditions for the bride.

Meanwhile, the bride prepared herself for the wedding ceremony. She knew the ceremony would begin approximately a year after declaring their intentions to get married, but the exact day or hour was unknown. As the bride, she and her wedding party attendants were to be prepared on a moment's notice.

When the long-awaited day came, the wedding feast and ceremony started with one of the groomsmen leading the bridegroom through the streets, yelling, "Behold, the bridegroom comes!" After a shofar horn sounded, the entire wedding party went to the bride's house. And she had to be ready, for her new husband would immediately take her to a wedding feast that would last seven days.

### **Preparing to wait**

The process of preparing for marriage in the Jewish tradition was as crucial as the wedding ceremony and feast. Likewise, being the bride of Christ isn't about standing at the altar in a white dress; it's about waiting and preparing for His presence in our lives on a daily basis, focusing on our relationship with Christ instead of spending all our time talking about what heaven will be like one day when we get there.

When I was growing up, I couldn't wait for Christmas Day because I was excited about all my presents under the tree. In fact, I had such a hard time waiting that I became a master at rewrapping presents after sneaking a peek during my parents' shopping excursions. However, my sneaking around quickly turned Christmas Day into a disappointment as I never had surprises.

Waiting for anything in life is difficult, but we learn – some sooner than others – that waiting is essential to becoming passionate followers of God. To wait for God means that we put our heart and soul into being prepared for Him and His calling on our life, not simply counting down the hours, minutes, and seconds.

Once we understand the traditional Jewish customs involved in a marriage, the parable in Matthew 25:1-13 takes on a new light. Those bridesmaids who weren't ready missed the feast. Jesus explained, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (v. 13).

Though this verse is specifically referring to Christ's triumphant return to earth, it can also be applied to the way we live daily. While we as believers have the Holy Spirit with us at all times leading and guiding, there are moments when we are thrust into situations where we must be ready to impact our world for Christ. We are prompted by the Holy Spirit to encourage, challenge, or share with someone. If we are serious about our faith, we must be ready to respond in obedience to His voice.

Oswald Chambers wrote, "The time of waiting may come to teach you the meaning of sanctification – to be set apart from sin and made holy – or it may come after the process of sanctification has begun to teach you what service means."

Waiting prepares us to do God's will.

### **Awaiting his return**

Being the bride of Christ means we stand firm in our faith, expectantly awaiting Christ's return. As we prepare ourselves for that day, we must be diligent to learn more about the groom. Through studying God's Word and sharing our faith with believers and nonbelievers alike, we begin to grow in our relationship with Christ. We see who He is. We see His desire for us. We see glimpses of God's magnificent plan for our lives.

When God calls on me, I want to be ready – not for vanity's sake but for His sake. I want to show Christ to others. I may not be wearing a white dress, but I want to be prepared. This is one wedding feast no one wants to miss.

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