

Friends of the Bridegroom (Pt. 2)

by Michael Koulianos

The sermon emphasizes the costly yet rewarding journey of developing a deep friendship with God through prayer and community.

Duration: 39:30

Scripture: Matthew 7:1

Topics: "Bridegroom", "The Power of Prayer", "Friendship with God"

Description

Michael Koulianos continues his sermon 'Friends of the Bridegroom' by emphasizing that while salvation is a free gift, true friendship with God requires trust and comes at a cost. He shares personal experiences of fasting and prayer, illustrating that genuine communion with Jesus is the ultimate reward, not merely a means to an end. Koulianos encourages believers to seek a deeper relationship with God through prayer, worship, and community, highlighting that true prayer is about oneness with Jesus rather than a transactional approach. He warns against the dangers of criticism and judgment within the church, urging listeners to focus on their own spiritual growth and relationship with the Lord. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to becoming friends of the bridegroom, prioritizing intimacy with Christ above all else.

Transcript

We're gonna continue in the teaching that is called Friends of the Bridegroom. Friends of the Bridegroom. I don't have time to review this morning.

You'll be able to go back soon and watch, watch the teaching from last week. But let me just give you a very general overview. Salvation is a free gift, friendship is not.

Friendship requires trust and friendship is costly. Salvation is free. But learning to walk with the Lord will cost you something, I promise you.

It just will. And once you discover friendship in the Lord, you realize that any price you pay pales in comparison to the beauty of his touch. I remember going on a 40-day fast.

I used to do maybe two or three a year at one point. Until I couldn't think. And I wasn't probably the most present husband because I couldn't even hear what Jess would say on day 30.

She'd be like, can you grab that? Huh? Can you go do that? What? So it's just so weak in me, it became hard to travel. But it was glorious. And what I've discovered, that typically, come like day 35 or 40 or

maybe like day 41 when I just come off the fast, the Lord would do something glorious.

Whether in prayer or in worship or the scriptures. I'd have a dream or something beautiful that changed my life. And to be honest, I remember most of those experiences with the Lord 15 years later that would happen on those fasts.

They were really marking. But one of the things I learned was that the moment you're in that experience with the Lord, you actually forget about your fast. And you forget about the hours in prayer.

And I think what I would love to see change is that we stop looking at prayer as the price for something better. I value people who've taught that. I love them, but I just don't see that as lining up with the scriptures when you have a healthy view of prayer.

When you have a biblical view of prayer. What we've been telling this generation, especially in intercession movements, is prayer is the price to get something better. And the only way to think that way is to not see prayer biblically.

Prayer biblically is communion with Jesus. The asking realm of prayer is a small piece of it that should take you in an hour, eight minutes. Eight minutes of your hour, maybe.

You wait on the Lord, you're in the scriptures, you're communing, you're worshiping until it becomes very real. And you ask typically with clarity and focus and you know it's done because you're in the presence of God. Asking outside of the presence of God is not the place of faith.

So when you're asking in the presence of God, Jesus is near, being that he is the spirit of faith, faith is available, and you ask and you know it's done. A great man said about 30 years ago, when I have 10 minutes to pray, I worship for nine. And my father-in-law taught us that as well.

If you have 10 minutes to pray, worship for nine. It's so true, it's so powerful. But prayer is not the price.

Prayer is not even the price to be used of God. Let me help you. Many people are used of God who don't pray.

In the Bible, I mean a mule was used of God. Yes or no? So as long as you make prayer the bridge, it's a statement that you don't know what prayer is. Prayer, true prayer is oneness with Jesus.

True prayer is the experience of God's presence. Madam Guion said it's the tuning or the turning of the heart to the Lord. Prayer is, if you're writing, get ready to write, prayer is, this isn't a teaching on prayer, but it does have to do with being a friend of the bridegroom.

Prayer is a manifestation of your salvation. You say, no, no, no, no, what do you mean? I got saved at the altar, my sins went away. That's like this much of the pie.

It's a huge piece of the pie. Don't get me wrong, it's important. Because if there's no blood on the altar, there can be no oil.

There can be no presence of the Spirit in the life of something that has not been washed by the blood. So the blotting out of sin is vital. It's vital, it's important.

Thank God for it. Is anybody here happy that you will stand before the Lord wearing the Lord's righteousness and not the stain of your own crimson? Amen? Though our sin be as scarlet, we shall be white as snow. That is a wonderful, wonderful thing.

However, there is more to our salvation than the mere removal of sin. There is the coming in, the indwelling of the Spirit who comes to live inside of you. And when you see that communion as an actual manifestation of what Jesus paid for, you'll never devalue it again and make it part of a journey to go fill a stadium.

That was better than your reaction. What we've done is we say, I am going to seek the Lord so that he'll do this. And without knowing what we're declaring to ourselves, you know you can't talk to yourself without knowing and create an internal culture without even knowing you're doing it and you create this value system.

What we do is we actually tell ourselves that that stadium is more important than fellowship because I am praying to fill that. We should ask, we should seek, we should knock. But let's talk about that for a moment.

Asking, asking's the shallow end. Ask, seek, knock. Asking is the first stage.

Asking is needed. Jesus said, you have not because you ask not, but asking is kindergarten. And most of us don't even do that.

And we wonder, why has my life jacked up? Ask yourself this question, have I asked the Lord? Why hasn't that happened? Have I asked? You say, no, most of the time we don't ask because we're too stressed to ask. We're too in our head to ask. We spend all day rehashing things in our head.

Two weeks later, the Lord goes, why don't you just ask? Is that not true? You worry about your rent for a month and forget to ask. Or what if it's a physical condition? What about just asking the Lord to heal you? Don't the scripture say, heal me. Lord, I cried unto thee, heal me and I shall be healed.

Sometimes you just need to ask. But once you ask and he replies with the answer, ask and you shall receive. Once you receive, you're stricken with wonder.

You're blown away. Oh my gosh, there is a God in heaven. This is actually real.

I am not some spiritual robot who wastes his time. This book is alive. Amen? Oh my gosh.

And he actually answers. What does that do once he answers? What's it meant to do in the economy of God? It is meant to get you to seek. Why should you seek? Because this wonderful God who said yes to you is now pulling on your heart.

He gave to you so that you'd seek. He answered the asking so that you'd take it a step further. Then you seek.

That seeking is a more mature phase. And this is all in Matthew's gospel. That seeking is a more mature phase.

And again, most Christians are not even faithful to ask. I ask the Lord all the time. I wanna be your friend.

I wanna be your best friend. I wanna be better friends with you than anybody in the world. You say, that's prideful.

I'm not asking. I don't need him to tell people about it. And I'm not gonna.

Did you know I'm the Lord's best friend? Who would do that? You know, today, if you went up a mountain, not you, but if some went up a mountain and their face came down shining, we'd probably come down going, look at my face, it's shining. Moses didn't even know. Spiritual pride says, hey, check out my face, it's glowing.

Doesn't it look nice? I'm not talking about that. But when you ask, ask for weighty things. When you fellowship with the Lord, yeah, you ask for big things and small things.

I don't ask the Lord what I should wear. I know people do that. I'm not judging you.

By the lips of some of you, keep asking. You have not received. Ask in faith.

You're asking amiss. You're tossed to and fro. Double-minded people are tossed to and fro.

Just joking, all right. Unless some ask for their parking spaces. I don't really care.

Because if I get a bad parking space, it's just cardio and it's a great opportunity to work out. But whatever. But the deeper your friendship becomes, your conversation should become more childlike.

And you discover that the Lord cares about the sparrow. That's amazing. And the Lord knows when, you know, regarding hair, you either have traders or deserters.

They either turn white or they leave. But he knows about all that. And I personally want, I want to ask for the simple things, but I also wanna ask for the weighty stuff, the stuff of eternal measure, the stuff that will matter in the age to come.

I want proximity to the Lord. I wanna be your best friend, doing me whatever you need to do, whether it's painful or not, to make me like you. Do not leave me to myself, Lord.

Do not leave me to my own ways. Let Romans 8 be a reality in my life. Conform me into the image of Jesus at all costs, even if it's uncomfortable here.

Pray that kind of stuff. Pray stuff like this. When people don't want you, let me be one that wants you.

When people don't wanna talk to you about things that are on your heart that grieve you, let me be, mold me into a man or woman who is trusted before the throne. Talk to me about what hurts you. So this seeking place is the seeking of the one who said yes when you asked.

Okay. And this second realm, I hate to use realm because it sounds like a Jetson cartoon, but this place, this seeking place in the spirit, it's forsaken. It's rarely visited by the church because it takes time.

Time. There's no fast track. It takes time.

It takes closing the door. It takes scheduling, responsible scheduling. It takes saying no to great opportunity.

It takes saying no to what most people would never say no to. In my context, it would be saying no to preach on some big platform, to shut my door and be alone with the one who loved me and died for me. That's the seeking place.

That takes time. Now, once you find him, once you find the one you've been seeking, his beauty is revealed to us. We discover that, as the Shulamite said, he is altogether lovely.

And we've never met anyone else like him. When you find, once you've been seeking and you find, you find the beautiful one, even if he comes with a suffering heart. When you find the wounded, pierced, bloody one, he's still beautiful.

Is this a Sunday morning teaching, or is this all right, too much? He's still beautiful. The tree is beautiful to the one who's been seeking. To the natural eye, it's horrific.

But to the one who's been seeking, he's beautiful. A great woman once said, I want the Jesus of Calvary as much as I want the Jesus of the transfiguration. I just want him.

Amen? Now, once you find that one, now this is rare air where I'm going now. This is rare air. I don't know, but a handful of people who go for the third place, the knocking.

The knocking. You get to the one that you found, you discover his beauty. And he has stricken you with, oh, don't get me wrong here, I don't mean the vision like you mean.

This internal vision of who he is. And even the things you don't understand about him wound the heart. You discover his holiness in that he's entirely different than anyone you've ever known.

And it's quite healthy to experience that he's entirely different than us in many ways. Oh, in a galaxy amount of ways. Yet he's still a man.

And this is where you step into the holiness of Jesus. And once you see the holiness of Jesus, remember what Matthew five says. Let's turn there.

Are you enjoying this? I just don't want prayer to be looked at as this little bridge that takes me from, oh, where I'm at now to where my next little season is. And all of a sudden, it's just proof we don't know what prayer is. Prayer is the reward, it's not the price.

If you're paying a price at all in prayer, it's to go into deeper prayer. I don't spend time with Jesus so that I can preach. I don't spend time with Jesus so Jesus 22 will grow.

We're to spend time with Jesus because we're in love. Where else shall we go? To whom shall we go, Lord? You alone, you have the words of life. And Matthew five says this, listen.

Verse eight, blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. And this is that place, that place that it's the end of that seeking place. It's like the ninth inning in the seeking place where the heart is so purified by the Lord himself because the Lord lives inside of us.

The scripture says, is the heart of man not the candle of the Lord, not the lamp of the Lord? So the Lord lives inside of us and the heart becomes this flaming altar. And the brighter that flame burns, that is fanned with attention and worship and adoration and reading the scriptures and fellowship with other people, all of these things are like you taking that little flame and throwing gasoline. Every time you worship the Lord,

when you wanna be stressed, you're putting gasoline on the fire.

Every time you pay a price to get into the house of God, let me tell you something. There's no substituting the gathering of the saints. There is not.

One of the great methods of deception, one of the great roads of deception that I've seen, even in people who've come in and out of Jesus' image is this they find a place where they are all alone. They cut themselves away from fellowship, especially challenging fellowship. They become their own pastor and they become their own Holy Spirit.

Without knowing, they become their own Trinity. Nobody tells them what to do. They're not open to feedback, even if they tell you they want it.

If you're gonna tell someone I'm open to feedback, you've gotta take the feedback. I wouldn't know how to be pastored without letting somebody tell me what to do. I love it when people who love me enough warn me, makes me feel loved.

Is it always easy? No, but I leave going, thank you for protecting me, Father. Are you with me? So one of the ways that you throw gasoline on that fire is through the gathering of the saints. Is one thing to take communion alone? We should, I do it.

But it's much more beautiful to receive it with the body. It is the supper that speaks of the body. It's the tearing of the bread into many that make the body one.

There's something about taking it with brothers and sisters. Are you with me? And coming to the table demands forgiveness. Coming to the table demands reconciliation.

Yes? So it's the coming together that is so powerful that accomplishes much more than we ever know. That is one way you put gasoline on that fire. Another way is praying the scriptures.

You read through the scriptures slowly. Gasoline on that fire. Obeying the Lord when he tells you to preach the gospel to someone.

Gasoline on that fire. Before you know it, that fire gets bigger and bigger and bigger right here in the heart. And what it does is it purifies the heart.

And once the heart is purified, we begin to behold the Lord. That's verse eight. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

That is a future reality and a present reality. You begin to behold the Lord. As the scriptures say, they looked unto him, the Lord, and their faces were shining.

It does something. Amen? Now, once you see the Lord that way and you find him, this is the rare error. This is where a few go.

They go, you're beautiful. And I'm thankful that you're revealing yourself to me this way. Jesus, I'm so grateful.

But I'm gonna take a risk here, Lord, even though I'm thankful that I found you. I asked and received, I seek, and now I find. I'm thankful that I found you, but something in my soul says, strike the ground with

the arrow over and over again.

I'm gonna knock now. Now I want into the one who I found. I don't wanna be a daughter of Jerusalem.

I wanna be Shulamite. I don't wanna be like the other kings. I wanna be like David, who says, keep me as the apple of your eye.

I wanna be like John when the other disciples were too afraid to even ask a question. Not only was John brave enough to ask the question, he was brave enough to put his head on the Lord's chest when the others were afraid to talk to him. That's knocking.

You wanna go in through encounter and experience to the one experientially who you found. That, friends, listen carefully, that is pricey. That will require your calendar, your money, your obedience, being misunderstood.

That will require hours in the Word to discover his heart that you might know his ways and not be like Israel, who just saw his works. Because you can't go in without knowing how he does stuff, what he likes, what he doesn't like. That's why I say, and now, after you just heard that, prayer's not the price.

Prayer's the treasure of life. David writes in the Psalms, I have given myself to prayer. Another way of reading that is I have become prayer.

What will you do, I guess, if you make prayer the bridge, what do you do once he's done using you in the land you've arrived on once you cross the bridge? What happens when God dismisses the crowds? Because that comes to everyone. What happens in that stage of life when you're all alone on the recliner? Gosh, I cannot believe I am 45 this month. Can you believe that, Kathleen? You can't? Ha, ha, ha, rebuke.

Ha, ha, ha. 45, I met Jess when I was 25. I cannot, I am over the hill.

Ha, ha, ha. I mean, my plan is to pastor you as long as I can, but the day will come where it might be tough to get to this pulpit. And maybe Augusta National will call and say, please be an honorary member.

No, really. I mean, even Jesus dismissed the crowds. Jesus deserves to be dismissed.

His earthly ministry did not end with massive meetings. It ended with a few at the foot of the cross, and I think it might be a healthy question, why should it be any different for his followers? It's why this sexy celebrity preacher church thing is a bunch of garbage. I am famous now because I'm giving you messages that you wanna hear, but the moment I age out, I've gotta do so much to my face just to feel relevant.

Next thing you know, you're 50 and everything's getting stretched out. That's not the faith. It's not the faith handed down to us once and for all.

What am I saying? You better believe seasons change. And one of them is this. One day, it'll just be us and a few around us.

What do you do now? If prayer's the price, what do you do when God's done using you in that way? I'll tell you what you do. You build a reservoir now. Get lost in his presence.

Become a friend of the bridegroom now. I didn't even get to my sermon. Become a friend of the bridegroom now.

Build a storehouse now. Don't learn how to pray when you're 70 or 80. Learn now.

Do you know why death is so hard for some? Because they're still holding onto the world. Affections. The church fathers called them passions.

The passions of the soul that all revolve around me. Oh, the pride of life, the lust of, it's the same old thing that happened 6,000 years ago. The same old deal.

And you hold on, you hold on. Where does pain really come from in that context? It's because something's being taken from us that we love. Where does fear come from when something that you love is threatened? Right, why are you fearful over your children? Because you love them.

We all go through that. You love them. Why are some people afraid of losing their money? You ready? Because they love it.

That's a sin. I said that's a sin. May we be delivered from it.

You know how happy you can be when every time God gives you money, you know it's not yours and you can just be like a little Holy Spirit sprinkler and just give it away. Give it away. Be generous.

It's wonderful to live that way. But why are some such slaves to their business? Because they're afraid of losing that thing. There's a difference between stewardship and slavery.

No, no, no, you don't wanna be had now by anything. Listen to me, not by fame. One of the best things you could do is to get off social media after you register for Jesus 22, get off social media for like a month.

God, you'll be shocked at how happy you'll be because most of the people that you are offended by or think that God should be using you in a similar, they're all lying. They're showing two minutes of their day. They're not showing you their arguments with their spouse.

And the ones who post the good meetings never post the bad meetings they had. They only post the miracles. They don't post the 2,000 people they prayed for that didn't get healed.

And then you compare yourself to that, you're like, I'm not called. Turn it off. Hear the voice of the bridegroom.

Hear the voice of the bridegroom. Last week, I went away for two days because life got busy, got painful, got cluttered. You can probably tell I'm a little bouncy and chippery today, huh? I look like a little Keebler elf.

A little leprechaun. That's what my spirit feels. I'm all jacked up today.

But that's what happens when you go be away with the Lord. My, I have a crazy life in the natural. If I were to look at it very methodically and systematically, I go, I'm doing all that? I'm leading all that? And then I would write myself a note.

You are a psycho for even trying that. What is wrong with you? That's what my journal would say in the flesh. What is wrong with you? You are crazy.

Play more golf. Sayeth the Lord. But that's what happens when your vision goes from there to here.

And you've got all the noise. Like right now, it's 12 o'clock. All of America says church ends at 12.

That probably explains the problem. Is that the clock is more, is louder in the hearts of pastors than the Holy Ghost? Now, I don't believe in keeping you long, especially if the meeting's dead, because long dead meetings are way worse than short dead meetings. Amen.

This better, you better not think this is dead. Okay. But there are pastors who are slaves to the noise.

That's not a pastor, that's an employee. Pastors don't work for the people. They serve the people and work for God.

Are you hearing me? So last week I told Jessie, baby, I'm out. Can you handle this? Of course, it's gotta work. She felt strong enough to handle it.

I went for two days. The moment, the moment I walked into this little room. And I got out of town, because Jesus got out of town.

And the moment I walked in that room, usually it takes me a day, a day to wait, because I need that fire just to burn Michael up so that Michael can sense his presence. That didn't happen this time. I walked into that little room and it was like the Lord was going, I've been waiting on this one for months.

I sat down on this little sofa and opened my Bible, and it was like heaven on earth. And I feel like I got born again, again. And I'm happy.

And you know, people are still stupid. It's that old saying, stupidity is contagious. It's a transferable anointing.

People are still dumb. People are still blind. People still don't get it around me, but I don't need them to get it for me to get it.

And God will liberate you and set you free. Are you with me? You can't have that. You cannot have that if the ministry assignment is the reason you pray.

Because one day the assignments will lift. I'll never forget going to visit Oral Roberts multiple times. What would he do just sitting on that chair? On a leather chair, he's just sitting, looking out at the golf course.

And I thought, wait a minute. This is the man who told the world God was good. This is the man who built a university.

I think he raised \$500 million in the 60s. This is the man who prayed for the sick on TV. This is the man who made these tent revivals a thing and prayed for the sick.

Now he's on a chair, looking out the window. Not just for a month, that was for a few years. Thank God he knew the Lord he served.

Thank God he knew how to open the scriptures and read the precious holy word of God. Thank God he started doing that young. Because this pathway takes a while.

You will not learn it in a day. Start now while you can. Be a friend of the bridegroom.

Now. Now, figure it out now. Are you with me? Let me give you one scripture from my sermon so that I can feel better about myself.

Oh, not that one. That one begins with brood of vipers. I'm too happy for that one today.

All right, we won't do Matthew 12. Okay. Jesus said, listen carefully, let me give you another translation there.

I am a little picky with translations and no, I won't answer your question about which one I'm talking about. Students at Jesus School love to ask me that one. Which ones do you not like? I'm not doing that one.

Okay. Matthew seven. I'll just read New King James from my Bible.

Matthew seven, verse one. I wanna give you a secret on how to be so consumed with the bridegroom and how to, according to the scriptures, resist temptation and thwart that process. You don't wanna thwart the process.

Judge not that you not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged. Oh my.

Let me tell you what that looks like. You're running a business or let's say somebody else is running a business and you don't. You've never had the pressure of running a business.

You work at that business and you criticize everything they do when they run their business. But you never had the guts to go up to the person and actually just talk it through. What you're signing up for in that moment is somebody who's serving you, criticizing you behind your back and never taking the time to understand you.

And with the same measure you judged your boss, you will be judged with. If it's wrong judgment, let's say you get it wrong, which we do. We get it wrong about people.

Guess what? People are gonna get it wrong about you. And when you discover they got it wrong about you, it's gonna break your heart. Just like it broke your boss's heart.

That's what this kinda looks like. With the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. Verse three, and why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye but do not consider the plank in your own? Or how can you say to your brother, let me remove the speck from your eye and look, a plank is in your own.

Jesus is going, dude, you can't take a speck out of his when there's a log in your own. You can't see well enough. And by the way, Jesus is like, there's a log sticking out of your face.

Verse five, hypocrite. Well, the Lord is so kind. The Old Testament revealed our need for him and his holiness.

Fire and brimstone. But this New Testament Jesus would never rebuke hypocrite. First remove the plank from your own eye and then you'll see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Do not give what is holy to the dogs nor cast your pearls before swine unless they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you in pieces. If you want to be caught up in the friendship of the bridegroom, stop criticizing others. Let me read this to you.

I touched on it last week and then I'll close in prayer, we'll receive communion. Criticism, or I should say, criticizing that which I have, write this down, criticizing that which I have no God-given authority in. So let me help you in this context.

You might be sitting in this seat going, I have the authority to rebuke the team at Jesus Image and tell the team how to run the church. No, how do you know you don't? Because you're not on a team. So I'm not trying to be rude, I'm just trying to help you like how to clearly know if you have authority in that realm or not.

Now you can think stuff and we're accountable so never serve a church that's not accountable. If you don't see fathers and mothers behind us, which there are about nine to 10, who will rebuke the pants off us? Some of them seem to enjoy it. That's what Joy Dawson was to us.

She loved it, thank God I miss her. She's probably doing it from heaven, I just can't hear it. You don't wanna sit under a church that is not covered and held accountable.

Authority depends on submitting to authority. So I wanna make that clear. But what destroys church is when we go, hey that person at that prayer line, I should be there.

That's my job. And they didn't pray for that person the right way. Dion doesn't pray for people the right way.

He should use his left hand instead of his right and his posture's really bad when he does it. No, don't like it, don't like it at all. That's called criticizing what's not yours.

Criticizing that which you have no God-given authority in is a sin that is hated by God. This destroys church's and birth's division. And it shrouds itself in tears, shyness, and what seems to look spiritual.

Next week I will teach on four biblical passages that address that, okay? So I just wanted to give you one thing to resist this week. Judgment that will suck you up and out of the delight of the soul. Jesse will tell you, when I got back from my little trip, I'm too caught up to care.

And it's awesome. And you can be happy. You can all be happy in Jesus.

It's legal, amen?

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