



[Matthew 25:1-13](#)

(1) Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. (2) And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. (3) They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: (4) But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. (5) While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. (6) And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. (7) Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. (8) And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. (9) But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. (10) And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. (11) Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. (12) But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. (13) Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

King James Version

The [Parable of the Ten Virgins](#) pictures the church waiting for the Bridegroom's return. Because of an unexpectedly long delay, He finds half the virgins unprepared when He finally arrives.

In weddings of that time, the bridegroom traditionally led a procession of bridesmaids from where they waited to his home. Since the procession almost invariably took place at night, each bridesmaid was expected to supply her own torch or lamp. If the bridegroom came later than expected, the bridesmaid needed to be prepared with extra torches or oil for her lamp.

The difference between the wise and the foolish virgins in the parable is not that one group did not have oil, but that one group did not have *enough* for the unexpectedly long delay. When the cry went out, their lamps were still burning, but they were sputtering and going out. Oil, of course, represents God's [Holy Spirit](#). The wise virgins, like the

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faithful and wise servant of [Matthew 24:45-51](#), are prepared. They make sure that they remain in contact with the dispenser of oil, as is implied when they say to the foolish virgins, "No, . . . go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves" (verse 9). The wise had been in recent contact with the dispenser of oil, whereas the others apparently had dallied around. Going frequently to the dispenser, the wise, when the bridegroom arrived, had an adequate supply to trim their lamps and go into the marriage supper. *The lesson is preparedness through vision and foresight.*

Because it is an internal state, preparedness cannot be transferred. That is evident in the reaction of the virgins. It is a matter of the heart, an intangible that accrues by spending long periods of time under many circumstances with the Dispenser of the Holy Spirit. What cannot be transferred to those who are unprepared are matters of attitude, character, skill, knowledge, understanding, and [wisdom](#). They are personal attributes that are built and honed over months and years.

When one needs a skill immediately, how much time does it take to learn it? If a man suddenly needed the skill to repair an automobile, and he had never done any work on one, he may as well have no hands at all! It works the same way with spiritual attributes. Preparing for eventualities is the lesson of this parable. The wise virgins prepared for the eventuality that it might take longer for the bridegroom to come—they showed foresight and vision, and they entered the wedding feast. The others did not.

The oil cannot be borrowed either. In no way can it be passed from one person to another. We cannot borrow character or a [relationship with God](#). The parable teaches us that opportunity comes, opportunity knocks, and then opportunity leaves. The foolish failed to face the possibility that the bridegroom would come later than expected, and when they were awakened, they had no time to fetch any oil and fill their lamps.

No one can deliver his brother. Each person determines his own destiny. No matter how close we are, even if we are one in flesh as in marriage, a husband cannot deliver his wife, and a wife cannot deliver her husband. Nor can we deliver our children. Everyone stands on his own in his relationship with [God](#). God makes this clear in [Ezekiel 14:14](#): "'Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness,' says the Lord God." Though it is a hard lesson, it should motivate us to discipline ourselves, to exercise self-control, to be alert, and to give our attention to our spiritual priorities. Thus, each person determines his own destiny.

Equating the foolish virgins with their modern counterparts, the [Laodiceans](#), their [faith](#) is perfunctory. Their church membership is routine, merely going through the motions.

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They have enough faith that they at least show up for church services. They have beliefs and character and motivation—but not enough!

The Bridegroom's refusal to admit the five foolish virgins (verse 12) must not be construed as a callous rejection of their lifelong desire to enter the Kingdom. Far from callous, Christ's rejection is entirely justified because these people never make preparations for their marriage to Him. In the analogy, though they realize they have met their future mate and admire Him, they never develop the relationship. In a sense, they have already rejected Him. Thus, an additional lesson in this parable is that *our relationship with God must be worked on continually.*

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

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