The Parable of the Ten Virgins

This session covers:

- An overview of the parable of the ten virgins
- The need to be on the alert and to purchase more oil for our lamps
- How to develop an intimate relationship with Jesus

This session corresponds to:

- Session 10 of Understanding the Bride of Christ CDs

An Overview of the Parable

1. The parable of the 10 virgins compares the kingdom of heaven to 10 virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the Bridegroom.

   - As the story goes, five were wise and five were foolish.
   - All 10 had an initial supply of oil to fuel their lamps, but the foolish did not take any extra oil in their flasks.
   - While the Bridegroom delayed, they all got drowsy and began to sleep.
   - At midnight, when the shout came that the Bridegroom was coming, all 10 virgins rose up to meet him. But the foolish virgins did not have enough oil to keep their lamps burning.
   - So, when they asked the wise for some of their oil, the wise answered, "No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves" (Matt. 25:9).
• While the foolish virgins went to make the purchase, the Bridegroom
came and those who were ready—that is, those who had enough oil
for their lamps—went into the wedding feast and the door was shut.
• Later, when the foolish virgins wanted to come into the wedding feast,
the Bridegroom said to them, “Truly I say to you, I do not know
you” (Matt. 25:12).
• Jesus concludes the parable with this challenge: “Be on the alert then,
for you do not know the day nor the hour” (Matt. 25:13).

2. This parable is a prophecy of what the church will look like and how it
will function in the end times.

• This parable is set in the context of a larger section of Scripture, which
begins with Jesus’ disciples asking Him, “What will be the sign of Your
coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3).
• Jesus answered this question with a detailed description of end-time
events, stating that there will be famines, earthquakes, wars, upheav-
als, offenses, apostasy, persecution, and even the worship of the Anti-
christ (Matt. 24).
• However, what many people don’t notice is that Jesus’ answer does
not end with this list. He goes on in the next chapter to tell the par-
able of the 10 virgins (Matt. 25).
• Like the five wise virgins, we are to live with the same type of antici-
pation for our upcoming wedding day. Though we don’t know the day
or the hour, we do know that the Bridegroom will return soon.
• Like an ancient Jewish bride waiting with great anticipation for her
wedding day, we need to be alert, watchful, and focused on getting
ready for our marriage to Jesus.
• Before the Lord returns, the church will know her bridal identity, she
will make herself ready, and she will be seeking to know Jesus as a
Bridegroom God.

Who Are the Five Foolish Virgins?

1. The way people interpret this parable determines how much energy
they put into making themselves ready.

• Those who apply this parable to someone other than themselves
rarely take this call seriously. Many who think this way believe they
are automatically wise virgins because they are born again.
• On the other hand, those who view both the wise and the foolish vir-
gins as true believers usually see the urgent need to make themselves
ready.
• So the question we must answer is: Who are the five foolish virgins?

2. Some interpret the five foolish virgins as non-believers.

• A number of scholars interpret the five foolish virgins as individuals
who profess Christ as their Savior but are not really converted to the
faith.1
- Others interpret the foolish virgins as the Jews who rejected Jesus at His first coming.²
- Few scholars from earlier generations have viewed the foolish virgins as true believers.

3. As the Holy Spirit unveils the mystery of the bride of Christ in our day, many leaders now view the foolish virgins as true believers.

- Mike Bickle of the International House of Prayer in Kansas City and Bob Sorge of Oasis House Ministries, for example, both concur that all 10 virgins are sincere believers.³
- Rick Joyner of Morningstar Ministries writes in his book, The Final Quest, that the foolish virgins are true believers who possess eternal life, but they occupy the lowest rank in heaven.⁴

4. There is strong scriptural evidence that all 10 virgins are true believers who are waiting for the Bridegroom to return.

- First, Paul called believers “pure virgin[s]” betrothed to one Husband, Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 11:2).
- When we are born again, we become like a virgin in the site of God. The blood of Jesus justifies us, washes away our sins, and makes our spirit new (Rom. 5:1; Heb. 12:23). So, it would be biblically consistent for Jesus to use this same symbolism in His parable.
- In addition, consider that both the wise and the foolish had an initial supply of oil. Traditionally, some have reasoned that the foolish virgins did not have any oil; therefore, since the oil represents the Holy Spirit, they were never truly born again.
- However, notice what Matthew 25:8 says: “The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’”
- The word for “going out” in the Greek means “to extinguish, quench, to put out.”⁵ You can only extinguish a fire that is burning. You can’t extinguish something that has never burned.
- Therefore, this Greek word shows us that the foolish virgins’ lamps were being extinguished, meaning they once had light in them. And since you can’t have light without oil, all 10 virgins must have had an initial supply of oil in their lamps.
- Another point is that all 10 virgins went out to meet the Bridegroom when He came (Matt. 25:6-7). Unbelievers, or those only superficially professing to believe in Jesus, would not be interested or eager to meet Him. Only born-again believers would be waiting for His coming.
- Finally, the number of virgins—10—supports the idea that the virgins represent all believers.
- In the ancient east, symbolism was often used to convey and emphasize a particular truth. Biblically speaking, 10 represents the totality of the issue or circumstance being discussed.⁶
- For example, the totality of God’s Law was summarized with 10 commandments. The totality of God’s judgments upon Egypt was released through 10 plagues. The totality of testing for some believers in the church of Smyrna was carried out in 10 days (Rev. 3:10).
- So, when Jesus said that 10 virgins went out to meet Him, He was saying that the totality of the church—that is, every born-again believer—will go out to meet Him when He returns.
- In summary, there is strong biblical evidence that all 10 virgins were true born-again believers. And as we will see in the next section, only half were wise!

The Wise Virgins Contrasted with the Foolish Virgins

1. The wise virgins’ lights shined brightly because they were empowered by their secret life in God.

   - In this parable, the lamps symbolize the virgins’ external life in God, and it shined forth the light of their relationship with Jesus.
   - Observe what Jesus said:
     
     You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

   - The wise virgins’ light was their godly character. It was the fire of their passion for Jesus and the brilliance of their ministry, service, and good works. It was the power of God working through them because they were fully yielded to the Holy Spirit.
   - In summary, their light represented the external fruit of their personal walk with the Lord.
   - The lamps described in this parable were actually torches that were fed by a small vessel containing oil.
   - These vessels held a small amount of oil and had to be frequently replenished. Without the constant supply of oil, the light would go out quickly.
   - The oil that fueled these lamps was hidden by the vessel that contained it.
   - Just as oil was hidden in flasks, the wise virgins lamps burned brightly because of their hidden relationship with the Bridegroom.
   - This oil of intimacy could only be purchased by each virgin individually, and it could only be purchased in the secret place of intimacy with Jesus (Matt. 25:9; Rev. 3:18).

2. The wise virgins pursued intimacy with the Bridegroom whereas the foolish did not.

   - The Greek word for foolish is moros, which basically means being dull or sluggish.
   - The Greek word for foolish is moros, which basically means being dull or sluggish.
The foolish virgins were not evil; they were good people who were dull and sluggish in their walk with the Lord. Because they took their position as the bride of Christ for granted, they grew lukewarm. Rather than living in the Spirit, the foolish virgins lived by human reason, logic, and self-will (1 Cor. 2:12-16). Though they were born again, they were entangled in the busyness of life and were weighed down by the cares of the world. Because they did not make intimacy with Jesus their number one priority, Jesus spoke these sobering words to them: “Truly I say to you, I do not know you” (Matt. 25:12).

Throughout the Bible, the word “know” often suggests knowing someone fully or intimately. In fact, the Hebrew word for “know” is sometimes used to describe physical intimacy between a husband and wife (Gen. 4:1, NKJV).

The Greek word used for “know” in this parable is οἶδα, which means “fullness of knowledge.” This type of knowledge is fully developed, as opposed to knowledge that is still growing. Thus, Jesus was not saying He did not know who the foolish virgins were, for He is omniscient. He was saying that He did not know them intimately.

In contrast, the wise virgins developed an intimate relationship with Jesus. The wise virgins lived differently than the foolish. They paid the price to purchase the oil that kept their lights burning brightly. They also remained awake and alert (Matt. 25:13). The wise virgins went to the secret place on a regular basis to meet with their Bridegroom, and as a result, developed an intimate relationship with Jesus.

When the Bridegroom returned, therefore, the wise virgins had plenty of oil, their lamps burned brightly, and Jesus knew them intimately. Because the wise virgins took their personal relationship with God seriously, they were ready for the Bridegroom’s coming and were welcomed at the wedding feast (Matt. 25:10).

Alert at His Coming

1. In this parable, Jesus challenged His disciples to be spiritually alert and to look for His coming.

   - Jesus said, “Be on the alert...for you do not know the day nor the hour” (Matt. 25:13).
   - The interesting observation is that He did not give this admonition to the Pharisees, Sadducees, or any unbelievers. He was speaking directly to His disciples.
   - In Matthew, Jesus said:

     Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the
house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will (Matt. 24:42-44).

2. How do we stay spiritually alert?

- We must keep our attention focused on our relationship with Jesus. We can’t just go to church on Sunday and forget about Him Monday through Saturday. We must think of Him daily.
- We must exercise discipline in order to be attentive to His voice, meditate on His Word, and pursue His presence.
- We must fight off passivity and defend ourselves against spiritual slumber.
- We must keep our spirits ready to receive from God as we rest in His presence.

Getting Oil for our Lamps

1. Each of us needs a constant supply of oil to keep our lights burning brightly.

- As previously stated, oil represents our private life in God that produces a bright light in a dark world.
- This type of oil is produced or “purchased” as we meet with our Bridegroom in the secret place.
- As we purchase more oil for our lamps, we will develop a passionate love relationship with the Lord that will result in deep intimacy and maturity.
- Then, we will be known by our Bridegroom, experience the joy of the wedding feast, and partner with our Bridegroom King for all eternity (1 Cor. 8:3).

2. Each of us must purchase our own supply of oil.

- As Jesus so clearly tells us in this parable, we cannot borrow oil from anyone else—we have to purchase it for ourselves.
- Just like we can’t depend on another’s faith for our salvation, we can’t depend on anyone else for an intimate relationship with Jesus.
- We must go to the dealers ourselves (Matt. 25:9), and we must go often to keep our oil supplies replenished.

3. Purchasing oil will cost us time, money, and even friends.

- Though buying oil is expensive, the small price that we pay cannot even compare to the rewards we will experience at the marriage supper of the Lamb.
The wise virgins knew the expensive cost of oil, but they considered being eternally prepared for Jesus worth any price.

It is not always easy to buy oil for our lamps. Bob Sorge in his book, *Secrets of the Secret Place*, explains some of the challenges that we will face:

I connect viscerally with the pain of countless believers who carry the conviction that the secret place is central to an overcoming life but who struggle on a regular basis to maintain the secret place as a daily lifestyle. I know what it's like to live below what the Christian walk could be and yet feel almost powerless to change anything. I've watched myself return persistently to the sources which are no source. For example, when wanting to get revitalized from a draining day, we will look to television, as though its distractions will renew us—only to be left empty for the umpteenth time. Or, we will attend a church service in the hope that the preacher's walk with God will infuse us with fresh energy for the journey. But deep down we know that sermons and teachings, although edifying, can never replace the carrying power we find when we sit at His feet and hear His word for ourselves. We don't need to add another condemning word to the berating voices we all know so well. What we need, rather, is for our eyes to be lifted to the glorious hope we already carry within.10

For many believers, setting aside time and energy to meet with God on a regular basis is one of the most difficult disciplines of the Christian faith.

It's much easier to go to church, attend a conference, serve in a ministry, or even to take part in a corporate fast than to regularly set time apart to seek God personally.

Despite our good intentions, the cares of the world, busyness of life, careers, children, recreation, and so many other “good” things distract us from the secret place.

Despite the challenges that we face in pursuing intimacy with God, our mandate is to stay alert, press through the opposition, and remain focused on our relationship with Jesus.

We must overcome the oppositions and distractions in order to buy more oil in the secret place.

As we do this, we will become wise virgins whom the Lord knows intimately, and we will be welcomed into the eternal wedding feast.

Writing about the need to purchase more oil, Bob Sorge states:

The secret place is where we buy oil. As we come aside to commune with our Lord, we are renewed in the Holy Spirit, and our oil levels are replenished....Oil in the lamp represents having an inner reservoir of Holy Spirit reality....It doesn't cost much to get oil for ministry, but it will cost you a lot to get the oil of an intimate relationship with Jesus....The oil of authentic relationship is bought at the cost of investing time and energy
in the secret place. The foolish will allow urgent matters of the moment to pull them away from the secret place after having a minimal filling. The wise will stay and continue to be filled with oil until their hearts are energized by their love relationship with Jesus. Devote yourself to the secret place until your heart is overflowing with love and zeal for your Beloved. Then, make it the first priority of your day to keep that oil replenished. The secret is right here....The secret place is the threshold for resourcing the replenishment you need to sustain through the dark night of Christ’s delays.  

Developing an Intimate Relationship with Jesus

1. There is no secret formula for developing a relationship with God.

   - Because everyone is different, there is no one-size-fits-all program that guarantees intimacy with the Bridegroom.
   - We each have a unique makeup and personality. We learn differently and have varying levels of personal discipline. The different seasons of life further contribute to our individuality.
   - When we are single or married with no children, there is more time than when we have small children.
   - At times, our careers are overly demanding.
   - And then, as we reach retirement age, we often have more time to devote to our personal relationship with the Lord.

While there is no secret formula for developing intimacy with Jesus, there are seven scriptural keys that—regardless of personality or life stage—will help you along your journey.

Seven Keys to an Intimate Relationship with Jesus

1. Make time to sit at the Lord’s feet and dine with Him in His presence.

   - As Jesus relaxed at Martha’s house, her sister Mary was “seated at His feet, listening to His word” (Luke 10:39).
   - When Martha complained that Mary was not helping her with dinner preparations, Jesus told her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:38-42).
   - Jesus said that the one necessary thing is to push away the distractions in our busy lives and make time to sit at His feet.
2. Develop a lifestyle of meditating upon the Word.

- The psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees...I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word” (Psalm 119:11-16, NIV).
- As Jesus was teaching His disciples about the importance of intimacy, He said, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7).
- Throughout the Scriptures, God stresses the importance of abiding in, studying, meditating, and hiding the Word in our heart.
- Knowing Jesus through the Word is a critical dimension to a life of intimacy.

3. Meet with God in the secret place through prayer and fasting.

- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matt 6:6, NKJV).
- He says the same thing about fasting (Matt. 6:18).
- In essence, the Lord is saying that we can meet with the heavenly Father in the secret place of intimacy through prayer and fasting.
- Jesus also said, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Matt. 9:15-16, NKJV).
- Fasting and prayer are important disciplines that help us develop a greater intimacy with our Bridegroom.

4. Learn to hear God’s voice.

- Throughout the Scriptures, as God’s people heard His voice, they were drawn closer to Him.
- Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).
- What a powerful verse! Not only does hearing His voice position us to follow Him, it also positions us to be known by Him. This is exactly what Jesus taught in the parable of the 10 virgins.
- As we learn to hear the Lord’s voice, we are known by Jesus.

5. Develop a lifestyle of obedience.

- Knowing His Word and hearing His voice won’t automatically lead to intimacy, however, unless we also obey what we know and hear.
- Jesus told His disciples, “You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:14-15).
• Notice that we are only Jesus’ friends if we do what He commands us.
• Jesus also said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him” (John 14:21).
• Obedience proves that we really love God, and it draws us closer to the Father.

6. Develop a heart of worship.

• The Lord loves those who press in to His presence in worship.
• Revelation 4-5 offers us a glimpse of God’s throne room, where we see that worship is the predominant activity of heaven. Those who are closest to the Lord’s throne worship Him the most.
• As we worship the Lord, we draw close to Him. A lifestyle of worship helps us cultivate an intimate relationship with our Bridegroom.

7. Walk in humility.

• God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.
• Moses, who was the most humble man on the earth, communicated with God to face to face (Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:3).
• Those who walk in humility will have deep intimacy with the Bridegroom.

Let’s strive to be wise virgins. Let’s stay alert and make ourselves ready for the eternal wedding feast. Let’s check our lamps often, and, if it’s running dry, not delay in purchasing more oil.

Notes


Review Questions

True or False

1. In the parable of the ten virgins, the wise virgins refer to true believers in Jesus and the foolish ones refer to non-believers.

2. The parable of the ten virgins is a prophecy of what the church will look like and how it will function in the end times.

3. As God unveils His last day plans, many leaders in the Body of Christ believe that all ten virgins refer to true believers.

4. Even though the Scriptures are silent on the issue, the primary reason that many leaders think all 10 virgins are true believers is that they have heard God speak to them concerning this issue.

5. The wise virgins' lights shined brightly because they were empowered by their secret life in God.

6. Believers buy oil by faithfully attending church services and by committing to the vision of a local church.

7. There are several scriptural keys that will help us develop intimacy with Jesus.

8. One key to developing an intimate relationship with Jesus is to develop a

9. As the parable of the ten virgins teaches, we are ready for the eternal wedding feast when we accept Jesus as Savior and get our initial supply of

10. The two primary teachings of the parable of the ten virgins are to stay spiritually alert and to develop an intimate relationship with the Lord.

Fill in the blanks

11. Each of us needs a constant supply of __________ to keep our lights burning brightly.

12. Oil is produced or "purchased" as we meet with our Bridegroom in the __________ place.

13. Purchasing oil will cost us ____________, ____________, and even ____________.
14. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must make time to _________ at His feet and ____________ with Him in His presence.

15. To develop an intimate relationship with the Lord, we must also develop a heart for deep ____________.

Match the statement on the left with the appropriate theme from the parable of the ten virgins from the right (You can use an answer more than once).

   ____ 16. Dine with Jesus.
   ____ 17. Exercise discipline in order to be attentive.
   ____ 18. You do not know the day nor the hour.
   ____ 20. Learn to hear God’s voice.

Two main themes from the parable of the ten virgins:

A. Develop an intimate relationship with Jesus.
B. Stay spiritually alert.