

Message.

Being ready for God is a personal journey that no one else can do for you. Just like the story of the ten bridesmaids, it shows that you can't "borrow" someone else's faith or just act religious on the outside to get by. Real faith is built by spending time getting to know God personally every day, not just trying to look good in front of others. Life's waiting periods actually show the truth about our hearts: they reveal if we have a real, lasting relationship with God or if we are just trying to scramble and fix things at the last minute. Instead of just waiting for the end, the goal is to use that time to grow closer to Him.

Prayer.

Heavenly Father,

Guide me in the waiting to be more intentional and build a deeper relationship with You.

Amen.

Engage.

Read **Matthew 25:1-4**. At the start of the story, both groups look identical. They are all "virgins," they all have "lamps," and they are all there for the "bridegroom."

- What is the *only* physical difference between the "foolish" and the "wise"? (vs. 3 & 4)
- If the lamps represent our outward religious life (going to church, being a good person), what do you think the "oil" represents if it's something hidden inside that only God sees?

Read **Matthew 25:5-7**. Notice that the "delay" is what causes the problem. If the bridegroom had shown up right away, no one would have known the foolish ones were unprepared.

- How does a long wait or a difficult time in our lives reveal what is actually inside our hearts?
- According to James 1:2-3, what is the purpose of "trials" or testing? How does this help us understand why the bridegroom in the story was "delayed"?

Read **Matthew 25:8-9**. To a modern reader, the wise virgins seem selfish for not sharing.

- If the "oil" is a metaphor for a personal relationship with God, why is it impossible to "give" some of yours to a friend or family member at the last minute?
- According to Romans 14:12, who does this verse say we are ultimately responsible for when we stand before God? Does this explain why the wise virgins told the foolish ones to go and "buy for themselves"?

Read **Matthew 25:10-12**. When the foolish virgins finally arrive, the door is shut. The bridegroom doesn't say "You are too late" or "You didn't have enough oil." He says, "*I do not know you.*"

- What is the difference between knowing *about* someone and being *known by* them?
- **Supporting Verse:** Read **Matthew 7:21-23**. In these verses, Jesus speaks to people who did many "religious" things but were still turned away. What was the missing ingredient in their lives according to verse 23?

Read **Matthew 25:13**. The conclusion is to "watch" or "stay awake."

- If "staying awake" isn't about literally never sleeping (since even the wise virgins slept in verse 5), what does it look like to keep your "oil" levels high in your daily life?
- Read **Psalms 63:1**. How does the writer of this Psalm describe his search for God? How can we make our "waiting" for Jesus more about *desire* for Him and less about *fear* of being left out?

For these cities. For all people.

This week, focus on Jesus' story of the bridesmaids in Matthew 25:1-13.

Day 1. The "Borrowed" Flashlight

Focus: Faith is a personal connection, not a family hand-me-down.

- **The Activity:** Turn off all the lights in a room. Give one parent a strong flashlight but give the child a flashlight with no batteries. One rule: You cannot share flashlights or help each other. Ask the child to light their own path using the parent's light from across the room. *(It can't be done. See The Talk below.)*
- **The Talk:** In **Matthew 25:8**, the foolish bridesmaids asked to borrow oil, but they couldn't. The bridesmaids with oil weren't being selfish, because in this story oil represents our individual relationship with God. Just like your flashlight needs its own batteries to work, your heart needs its own "fuel"—a real relationship with Jesus. You can't get to heaven just because Mom or Dad believes.
- **The Prayer:** "Lord, help me not just to follow my parents' faith, but to know You for myself".

Day 2. The Secret Ingredient

Focus: Who we are when no one is looking is who we actually are.

- **The Activity:** Show your child two identical-looking cups of water. In one, stir in a lot of salt (the "hidden" ingredient). Ask them to guess which is which just by looking. Then, have them take a tiny sip.
- **The Talk:** The bridesmaids all looked the same on the outside—they all had lamps and they all dressed up. But the "oil" was the hidden difference. In **Matthew 25:12**, the Groom says, "I don't know you." He wasn't looking at their clothes; He was looking for a friendship.
- Read **1 Samuel 16:7**. What does this verse say about what people see versus what God sees? How does this change why we pray or read the Bible when we are alone?
- **The Prayer:** "God, thank You that You see my heart. Help me care more about being Your friend than just looking 'good' to other people."

Day 3. The Joyful Wait

Focus: We wait for God because He is worth it, not just to avoid trouble.

- **The Activity:** Tell your child you have a special surprise for them (like a favorite treat), but they have to wait 10 minutes. While you wait, sit and talk with them about their favorite things.
- **The Talk:** In the story, the "delay" made people tired. If we are just waiting for a "test," waiting is boring and scary. But if we are waiting for someone we love, the waiting is just time to get ready for a party. We don't grow closer to God just so we don't "get in trouble" when He returns; we do it because He is the best Friend we could ever have.
- Read **Psalms 63:1**. Does David sound like he is "scared" of God, or does he sound like he "thirsts" for Him? How can we make our "waiting" feel more like a friendship and less like a chore?
- **The Prayer:** "Jesus, thank You that You are worth waiting for. Help me enjoy Your company today while I wait for the day I see You face to face."