

# Illustrated Bible Life

## The Perspective of “Later”

In the parable of the 10 bridesmaids, 10 young women wait for the coming of the bridegroom and his party so that they can celebrate the marriage and participate in the festivities that will begin a week of rejoicing together with bride and groom. Unfortunately for five of them, participation in this happy event would not be forthcoming. These five had come eagerly to their post with lamps to light their way, only to find that the groom was late in coming. The small lamps they had with them did not hold enough oil for a long wait, and when they finally heard the joyful shouts of the wedding party, these lamps were going out.

The five who had planned ahead for the unexpected refilled their lamps with the extra oil they had brought and went off with the wedding party, advising the five “foolish” girls to purchase more oil and then rejoin them. Yet when the five arrived at the groom’s house, the door was shut, and no one would let them in.

One can’t help but feel sorry for these young women. We all know people (perhaps we are one of these) who always seem to be improvising—never prepared, never thinking about consequences, always in the moment. They aren’t evil or malicious, just happy-go-lucky. On the plus side, they never worry about the future; they often have faith that seems astoundingly rewarded more often than not. Nevertheless, they aren’t usually the ones everyone turns to when the car breaks down in the middle of nowhere, or the bridegroom takes longer than expected and the lamps are going out.

When we read the parables, sometimes we get caught up in the details of the story and miss what Jesus is trying to teach us. Dr. Thomas Phillips, who wrote the commentary for sessions 10-13, writes that the parable “is about Jesus’ return and the importance of being prepared for that return” (see Session 13). What does it mean to be prepared?

Dr. Phillips goes on to say, “One could argue that the point of this and of all parables about judgment is that one should always live from the perspective of later. Just do not do the things that you will later look back on and regret. When looking forward, think even further into the future. . . . It would be interesting to reflect on how many of our worst decisions, our most unwise actions, and our most destructive choices could have been avoided if we had merely stopped to ask ourselves, what about later?”

One could also ask, what *wise* decisions would we make if we were living from the perspective of later? What would we be prepared for, what benefits would there be for us and those around us if we were to consider more than just the present moment?

As we delve into these lessons from Matthew this quarter, let’s plan “for a future time when the door will be shut . . .with [us] on the inside banqueting, not on the outside wanting in.”