

Semicontinuous  
**Josh. 24:1–3a,  
 14–25**  
**Ps. 78:1–7**

Complementary  
**Wis. of Sol. 6:12–16  
 or Amos 5:18–24**  
**Wis. of Sol. 6:17–20  
 or Ps. 70**

**1 Thess. 4:13–18**  
**Matt. 25:1–13**

## Living in Hope

### Goal for the Session

*Tweens will be encouraged by the story of the ten bridesmaids to look forward expectantly and prepare faithfully.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Matthew 25:1–13

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Thomas D. Stegman, SJ

This parable is located in Jesus’ discourse on the end times (Matthew 24:1–25:46). It takes up key themes from the preceding context, most notably the glorious appearance of Jesus (24:30); its sudden and unexpected quality (24:44, 50); and the exhortation to be ready for it (24:42, 44). While the parable focuses on the maidens and their actions, it is important not to lose sight of its key figure, namely, the bridegroom. That the bridegroom is the Son of Man in glory will be made clear at the end of the parable, where he is called “Lord” (25:11) and speaks with divine authority (“Truly I tell you”; 25:12). In fact, Matthew has already pointed to Jesus’ identity as bridegroom in 9:15 and 22:1–10.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Mark Douglas

How does the story suggest we ought to live while awaiting the Son of Man’s appearance? Against claims that from this time forward it is only a matter of our working out the niceties of how to live in the kingdom that is already here, the text reminds us that this is not as good as it gets, that the bridegroom’s delay does not mean he will not come, and that the party will not really start until he arrives. It asks us to live in hope for what has been promised and what will be but is not yet.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” John Buchanan

It is significant that, near the end of his life, Jesus chose this most human event as the context for a parable: “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this . . .” (v. 1). In this parable, for whatever reason, the groom does not show up on time; the hours pass, and many of the waiting wedding party fall asleep. The early Christians had to adjust to the reality that Jesus did not return as they fully expected, and that their mission was to wait expectantly and in the meantime live faithfully, courageously, hopefully. It is our mission still.

#### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Lindsay P. Armstrong

We need to learn patience—and this is particularly true when waiting for God. This parable speaks a profound word to a fast-paced twenty-first-century populace. Now is the time for active discipleship. The kingdom of heaven summons us to new life, improved commitment, casting away of false idols, active waiting in hope, and renewed vigor in faith. Faithful action done now prepares us to weather the unexpected timing of God, even as it prepares us for a heavenly celebration. The Messiah comes “at the right time” (Romans 5:6), and brings a party with him.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Matthew 25:1–13**

## Focus on Your Teaching

The subject of the end time can be a fearful thing for tweens. Many of them have concerns about the future because of global warming, increasing pollution, and threat of war. Some may have been exposed to films or books that depict the end time as filled with destruction, judgment, and terror. This session is an opportunity to look forward to our future as God's people with anticipation and hope. We can visualize Jesus' vision of the end time as a joyful party with Christ as the host, and explore how we might get ready for that day by living faithfully.

*Thank you, God, for the opportunity to look forward expectantly and prepare faithfully. Infuse this session with your joy. Amen.*

**YOU WILL NEED**

- ☐ Resource Sheet 1 from October 22, supplies listed there
- ☐ clock with second hand
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- ☐ Color Pack 8, 21, 29, 32
- ☐ tea light candles, matches or lighter
- ☐ streamers

**For Responding**

- ☐ option 1: plastic bottle filled with water
- ☐ option 2: writing paper, envelopes, pens
- ☐ option 3: small glass jars, white glue, water, tissue paper, paintbrushes, glitter, tea light candles

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, go to Amnesty International's Web site, [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org), to find out more about this organization that uses a candle in its logo and reaches out to bring hope to others. Visit [bit.ly/FOWAmnestyLetter](http://bit.ly/FOWAmnestyLetter) for information about the group's annual letter-writing campaign.

Welcome tweens by name. Encourage them to tell about their week, naming any joys and concerns. Try to partner any newcomers with learners who attend regularly.

Gather the group by singing "God, We Sing" (Color Pack 29; track 8 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Following the instructions on Resource Sheet 1 from October 22, set the worship table and begin your time together in prayer.

Show the clock and watch the second hand for ten seconds. Then cover the clock and have learners raise their hands when they estimate one minute has passed. Call time at the actual minute. Invite them to tell about times they have waited:

✿ When was the longest time you had to wait for something?

✿ How did you feel when you were waiting? What did you do while you waited?

### EXPLORING

Tell how the Bible story for today is one that Jesus told about waiting. Ask what tweens know about *parables*, explaining as necessary that a parable is a teaching story that uses common objects or experiences to explain something else. Jesus told parables to teach about God and the kingdom of heaven—God's planned way for the world.

Tweens are growing in their ability to think abstractly. Help them consider the kingdom of heaven as God's rule and plan for the world that guides our lives now, as well as the future time when Christ returns to bring God's plan to completion.

If your church does not allow open flames, use battery-operated votives or place flames cut from construction paper around the picture.

### **I'm Gonna Sing When the Spirit Says Sing**

I'm gonna sing when the Spirit says sing,  
I'm gonna sing when the Spirit says sing,  
I'm gonna sing when the Spirit says sing,  
and obey the Spirit of the Lord.

I'm gonna walk . . .

I'm gonna leap . . .

I'm gonna praise . . .

**EASY  
PREP**

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids). Recruit a good reader to read the story aloud, and invite the rest of the group to be the chorus and make the noises or movements shown in italics.

Distribute copies of the top half of Resource Sheet 2 (Session Resources) and ask volunteers to read the pieces of background information. Ask:

- ✂ Why were the bridesmaids outside?
- ✂ Why wouldn't the five wise bridesmaids share their oil? Do you agree with the reason they gave? Why or why not?
- ✂ Why did the bridegroom refuse to let the five foolish bridesmaids into the wedding feast?
- ✂ Why do you think Jesus told this story?
- ✂ How was this parable like the situation that the early Christians were facing? How do you think this story might have encouraged them?

If possible, darken the room. Gather around Color Pack 21, and place the candle from the worship table next to it. Play "Music for Meditation" (track 16 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). As the music plays, read aloud the quote from Mother Teresa on Resource Sheet 2. When the music finishes, let silence gather for a few moments, then ask learners to suggest ways they might feed the light of God's love that is within them. For every answer given, light a tea light candle and place it around the poster. Look at the lights and notice how brightly they shine before extinguishing them.

Invite tweens to tell about weddings they have attended. Ask:

- ✂ What feelings are usually associated with a wedding?
- ✂ Why do you think Jesus chose a wedding as the setting for his parable?
- ✂ According to Jesus' parable, what can we look forward to?

Comment that Jesus' parable encourages us to look to the future with anticipation and hope. Invite tweens to celebrate this hope by joining you in a dance of joy. Sing together "I'm Gonna Sing When the Spirit Says Sing" (Color Pack 32; track 13 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024) and invite youth to dance, skip, or walk around the room, waving crepe paper or ribbon streamers as they sing.

## **RESPONDING**

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Game** As we wait in hope and faith, we are encouraged to live faithfully. Mark two lines on opposite sides of your meeting space. Have learners line up behind one line and place a plastic bottle filled with water on the other line. Explain that they have been sent to fetch the bottle of oil (water) for the bridesmaid's lamps and that you will call out the mode of travel. At "Go," the first person in line races to the other line, grabs the bottle of oil, races back, and passes it to the next person, while saying one way he or she will feed the light of God in his or her life during the coming week. Call out different modes of transport at random during the game, such as: walk on your knees, crawl, shuffle on

You might place the letters in the offering basket during worship. Ask the worship leader to dedicate the letters and pray that the recipients will be moved to act for justice.

### God, We Sing

God, we sing with praise  
to you,  
Light the flame of *hope* anew;  
Light this candle, light  
the way,  
Bring *hope* into our  
hearts today.  
Jesus, near us as we pray,  
Let *hope* be in our hearts  
today.

God, we sing with praise  
to you,  
Light the flame of *peace*  
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise  
to you,  
Light the flame of *love*  
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise  
to you,  
Light the flame of *joy*  
anew; . . .

God, we sing with praise  
to you,  
Light the flame of Christ  
anew;  
Light this candle, light  
the way,  
We celebrate new life today.  
Christ, be near us as we pray  
And celebrate new life today.

your behind, carry the bottle under your chin, frog-hop. Time how long it takes for the group to complete the relay, and if you have time, play again, challenging tweens to beat their previous record. If you have a large group, you may wish to form two teams and have them race each other, using two bottles.

2. **Letter Writing** Jesus' parable calls us to reach out with the light of hope to those living through tough times. Present appropriate information about Amnesty International and this organization's use of a candle in its logo to reach out to bring hope to others. Tell the tweens about the group's annual letter-writing campaign. Provide paper, pens, and envelopes, and invite tweens to work alone or in pairs to write letters and address the envelopes. Plan to mail the letters; perhaps your church office will provide stamps.
3. **Votive Candles** Make a reminder that while we wait, we are called to keep the light of God's love shining in our lives. Tear several colors of tissue paper into small squares. Mix four parts white glue with one part water. Demonstrate how to "paint" some of the glue mixture onto the outside of a small glass jar and press tissue-paper squares over the glue. When the glass is covered, paint another layer of glue over the entire jar, smoothing down any rough edges. Sprinkle on a little bit of glitter while the glue is still wet. Place tea light candles inside the jars. Suggest lighting the candles during prayer times or mealtimes at home—prayer helps keep the light of God shining in our lives, as can time spent with other Christians.

## CLOSING

Gather the group in your worship space and ask tweens to tell one thing they have learned today about waiting for the kingdom of heaven to come to its completion. Invite each person to place her or his hands around Color Pack 8. Offer this prayer or one of your own:

*God of love, thank you for stories that help us discover more about you and more about following in your loving ways. Help us to live and love as Jesus taught. Amen.*

Lead the closing charge:

**Leader:** Go out and feed the light of God within you.

**All: Amen!**

Extinguish the candle. Give each tween a copy of Mother Teresa's words from Resource Sheet 2. Thank each one for coming.

## The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids

Matthew 25:1-13

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. (*cheers*)

<sup>2</sup>Five of them were foolish (*silly giggle*), and five were wise (*thumbs-up sign*).

<sup>3</sup>When the foolish (*silly giggle*) took their lamps, they took no oil with them;  
<sup>4</sup>but the wise (*thumbs-up sign*) took flasks of oil with their lamps.

<sup>5</sup>As the bridegroom (*cheers*) was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. <sup>6</sup>But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! (*cheers*) Come out to meet him.'

<sup>7</sup>Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup>The foolish (*silly giggle*) said to the wise (*thumbs-up sign*), 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup>But the wise (*thumbs-up sign*) replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.'

<sup>10</sup>And while they (*silly giggle*) went to buy it, the bridegroom (*cheers*) came, and those who were ready (*thumbs-up sign*) went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut.

<sup>11</sup>Later the other bridesmaids (*silly giggle*) came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' <sup>12</sup>But he (*cheers*) replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.'

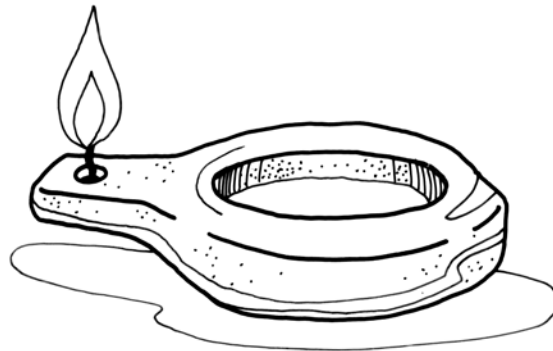
<sup>13</sup>Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."



## Session Resources

### Background to the Story

1. At this point in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is in Jerusalem shortly before his death. He is telling his disciples about the kingdom of heaven—the coming reign of God. At the time of Jesus, it was believed that one day the present world would come to an end and all creation would turn to follow in God's ways.
2. In Jesus' time, it was customary for the bridegroom and his friends to go to the bride's house to pick up the bride, often in the evening. The bride's friends waited outside to meet the groom, and then led the bride, the groom, and the guests to the groom's house for the wedding feast. Oil lamps carried by the bridesmaids lighted the way.
3. A *feast* is a common image in the Bible for the kingdom of heaven or the reign of God.
4. Acts 1:6–11 tells how Jesus leaves the disciples and is taken up into heaven. Jesus' first followers believed that Jesus would return soon to usher in God's end times and bring the kingdom of heaven to its completion. Time passed. Jesus did not return, and life began to get very hard for the followers of Jesus. Some became discouraged.
5. In Matthew 9:14–15, Jesus speaks of himself as a bridegroom.



### Oil in Our Lamps

What is necessary is to continue to love. How does a lamp burn, if it is not by the continuous feeding of little drops of oil? When there is no oil, there is no light and the bridegroom will say: "I do not know you." Dear friends, what are our drops of oil in our lamps? They are the small things from every day life: the joy, the generosity, the little good things, the humility and the patience. A simple thought for someone else. Our way to be silent, to listen, to forgive, to speak and to act. These are the real drops of oil that make our lamps burn vividly our whole life.

—Mother Teresa