

February 2022

Dear Friends,

I want to begin this letter with a big, resounding *Thank You!*

We finished our ministry year in December right where our donations needed to be! You helped us out of the red and into the black with an outpouring of generosity, and I just want to say thank you so, so much!

If you've been following the podcast at all (and I hope you do; it is so good for your heart!), you know that we've been reflecting on the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. I'm not alone in believing that this parable is where we are in human history. Let me tell you why, and how its warning can rescue us.

First, let's remember what life is: Life is a story that God is telling.

And like every other story, this one doesn't stay in the same place. Stories that don't go anywhere are really boring stories. Our story is currently *racing* towards its climax; Jesus wanted us to be prepared for the unique pressures such an hour brings. That's why, after he talked about the pressures in Matthew 24, he told this parable in Matthew 25:

“At that time [the end of this age] the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” (*Matthew 25:1-13 NIV*)

It's unnerving, to be honest. I think Jesus meant it to be.

Let's seize the obvious points first: There are wise bridesmaids and foolish bridesmaids, smart ones and dumb ones. The smart bridesmaids have taken care to bring along extra oil. The dumb ones don't, and it doesn't go well for them. The oil represents the presence of God in our lives. As C. S. Lewis observed,

God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. (*Mere Christianity*)

Crises like global pandemics are *draining*. You don't want to run out of gas, out of the presence of God in your life. Jesus urges us to be intentional, to make sure that we have more than enough to make it through today; he wants us to make sure we have *reserves*. Full tanks, lives filled with God.

So the question of the hour, the question every follower of Jesus needs to be asking, is this:

*What are you doing on a daily basis to make sure you have enough oil? That you are cultivating a plentiful reserve of the presence of God in your life?*

Right now, people are glad just to get something of their normal lives back. We've got restaurants, we've got travel—everything's okay! But that's a brilliant delusion, because tacos and a week at the beach are not going to see you through the rest of the year. Only the presence of your loving God can do that.

The pandemic was a "shaking." There are reasons to believe that another shaking is coming. I'm not a doomsday prophet. I can simply tell you that the men and women I know who hear from God in deep and profound ways have a sense we aren't out of the woods yet. That's why it's so important to be deeply grounded in God right now, cultivating a rich supply of his presence in our very souls. Let me make this very specific.

Here's a "bare minimum" plan; this isn't everything, but it will get you going:

- Morning prayer, before anything else. Especially before you check your phone, email, or the news. Get on the Wild at Heart app, listen to the Daily Prayer every day.
- Then linger with something devotional. I recommend the Lectio365 app, a morning and evening devotional that takes about ten minutes.
- Learn to release the pressures, demands, and madness. Use our Pause app to practice benevolent detachment and restore your union with Jesus. This takes three minutes; do it midmorning and midafternoon.
- Worship and bedtime prayer. Before you end your day, spend a few moments worshipping God. Do the evening Lectio365 segment. Finish with the Bedtime Prayer on the Wild at Heart app.

This will create a rhythm to your day that keeps you centered in Jesus and allows the oil of his presence to fill your tanks. *Success is in the rhythms we create for our souls.*

Like I said, it's not everything. We need Christian fellowship, joy, play, nature, the sacraments. But the plan I just gave you is simple and sustainable.

Let's be smart bridesmaids even though we might be surrounded by less-than-smart ones.

Offered in love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'John' written in a cursive, flowing style.