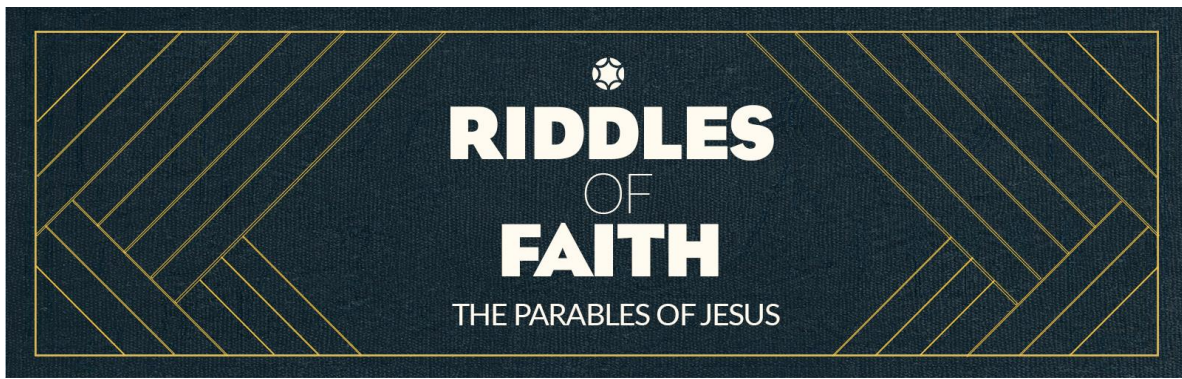




Group Guide

Week Three // Running on Empty

Scripture Focus

Matthew 25:1–13

Big Idea

Jesus calls us to live with a faith that is ready and prepared for his return. We do not know when Christ will come again, so we should not put off until tomorrow the life of faithfulness he is calling us to live today.

Read Together

Read Matthew 25:1–13 aloud. As you read, notice what the ten women have in common and what ultimately distinguishes the wise from the foolish.

Setting the Scene

Jesus tells this parable during his final days before the crucifixion. In Matthew 24–25, his disciples ask him about the future and his return. Jesus makes it clear that they will not know exactly when that day will come. Rather than giving them a timetable, he teaches them how they should live while they wait by using a parable about the familiar setting of a wedding celebration. Weddings in the ancient world often involved a procession in which attendants waited for the bridegroom and then accompanied him to the celebration. In Jesus' story, ten young women are waiting with lamps for the bridegroom to arrive.

Digging Deeper

Jesus describes five of the women as wise because they bring additional oil with their lamps. The other five bring their lamps but no additional oil. At first, there appears to be little difference between the two groups. It is only when the bridegroom is delayed that their preparation becomes important. At midnight,

the announcement finally comes that the bridegroom is arriving. The women wake and prepare their lamps, but the foolish discover that theirs are going out. They ask the others for oil, but there is not enough to share. While they leave to find more, the bridegroom arrives. Those who are ready enter the wedding banquet, and the door is shut.

Jesus calls us to a faith that remains faithful through the waiting. There will be seasons when following Christ feels exciting and his presence seems especially close. There will also be seasons when faithfulness requires patience, perseverance, and obedience even when we cannot see what God is doing.

The parable also reminds us that spiritual readiness is personal. The foolish women cannot depend on the preparation of the others when the bridegroom arrives. We cannot simply depend upon the faith of our parents, spouse, friends, pastor, or church. Jesus ends the story with its central challenge: “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” Keeping watch does not mean trying to predict when Jesus will return. It means living faithfully because we know that he will.

Group Discussion

Getting Started

- What stood out most to you from the sermon?
- Have you ever found yourself unprepared for something important? What happened?

Digging Into Scripture

- What similarities do you notice between the wise and foolish women? What ultimately distinguishes them?
- Why do you think the delay of the bridegroom is an important part of Jesus' story?

Personal Reflection

- Are there areas of your spiritual life where you feel like you are currently “running on empty”?
- What tends to cause you to become spiritually distracted or complacent?

- Who has helped strengthen your faith? How can we learn from the faith of others without depending upon someone else's relationship with God?

Looking Forward

- What is one area of your relationship with Christ that needs greater attention right now?
- Is there something God has been calling you to do that you have been putting off until “later”?

Individual Application

This week, take a few minutes to consider whether there are areas of your spiritual life where you are “running on empty.”

Ask yourself:

- What has been consuming my attention and energy?
- Is there an act of obedience I keep postponing?
- What would help me become more attentive to Jesus?

Choose one intentional practice this week that will help you remain attentive to Christ.

Consider memorizing:

Matthew 25:13

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the promise that Jesus will return. Forgive us for the places where we have become distracted, complacent, or unprepared. Help us remain faithful when the waiting is long and when following you requires perseverance. Keep our hearts attentive to you and give us the courage to obey you today rather than putting it off until tomorrow. May we live each day ready for Christ and faithful to the work you have given us. In Jesus' name, amen.