



Date: 12th & 19th November 2023

Theme: Parables of Faithful Waiting

**Bible Readings: Matthew 25:1-13
and Matthew 25:14-30**

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PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS

Please remember to contact your group beforehand to remind them of the date, time and venue. Good communication always helps, especially to establish a new group. Remember that the atmosphere of fellowship in the group, and the comfort and hospitality, are all really important in helping people to grow in faith and keep coming. As a group leader, make sure you have read all the material beforehand, and if you have any questions, please do get in touch with Andy or Mel, or talk to your minister.

PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

You don't need to take anything with you to this session, just yourself!

But it is always worth doing a little bit of preparation if you can. You might like to read the Bible passages – both from Matthew chapter 25. Reflect on what you make of them. How do they make you feel? The theme is 'Faithful Waiting'. Maybe jot down any questions you have, or any useful thoughts to share. – How are you with waiting? Finally, try to find five minutes of peace to bring to God your concerns of the day, anything that's on your mind, and ask God's peace and understanding as you meet with others.

STARTING THE SESSION: FINDING OUR ROOTS

After some refreshments and a chance to meet and chat, we start the session.

The group leader should announce that we will be waiting for 5 minutes in silence, which we will use for silent prayer...

After the silence, some questions:

How easy or hard do you find waiting?

What do you do in the waiting? Are you active or inactive?

Can you stay focussed or does your mind wander? Do you fidget or stay still?

Do you feel at ease, prepared, or uncomfortable?

A PRAYER (or a prayer of your own)

God of eternity,
In times of waiting, be our companion;
In times of action, be our purpose;
In times of suffering, be our comfort;
In times of blessing, be our celebration;
In times of uncertainty, be our hope;
Whether in silence or storm, be our peace,
Be with us today as we explore your word and learn from one another.
Give us joy in your presence, through Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

READING THE SCRIPTURES

Read together the Bible passages: **Matthew 25, verses 1-13 and 14-30**

Background Information:

The first hearers of Matthew's Gospel were in a confusing place. They were awaiting the promised return of Jesus, and wondering what to do in the meantime, in the face of great division and persecution. Matthew gives us these stories to warn and encourage. Set in the lead-up to Jesus' own death, when he was facing great opposition, these parables are about the attitudes of God's people in the waiting.

Are God's people waiting for Jesus to return? Certainly, yes. But we may be also waiting for God to act in other ways. Waiting for situations to resolve. Waiting for results. Waiting for peace. Waiting for a break, or a new start. These parables may seem harsh in places, but they are given to help us.

The first parable is about bridesmaids (or virgins, in some translations) waiting for the bridegroom to return. In **Matthew 9:15** (and other places), Jesus likened himself to a bridegroom. His critics wondered why his disciples didn't fast, like the disciples of John the Baptist and other teachers. Jesus said that the wedding guests can't be sad while the bridegroom is still with them. In the vision of **Revelation 21**, the 'new heaven and new earth' arrive as a bride beautifully prepared for her husband. The union between God and creation is to be like a marriage. The church is often called the 'Bride of Christ', based on Ephesians 5:22-23, where Christ is the head of the church (although marriages these days usually have both partners with an equal standing). In this Parable of Ten Bridesmaids, Jesus encourages his followers to make sure they have enough oil with their lamps. Trimming the lamps was also a way of being economical with them, and making sure they didn't use up too much energy when they burned.

The second parable is about the investment of resources while the master is away. A talent was a large weight of money. Three slaves were given different amounts of the master's money to look after or invest. Two are commended for using the talents wisely, and making more. One fearful slave decides to bury his, as he dare not risk losing it. In both parables, the master appears to be quite unforgiving!

DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for the group

What do you think the meaning could be for us of keeping oil in our lamps, or being ready for the bridegroom to arrive?

What does faithful waiting look like in our Christian lives?

Can you give examples of when you've had to be patient? Can you think of times you've given up?

What are the talents God gives us? How do you think Jesus wants us to use them? In the parable, the talents were given to increase the master's wealth. Can we use our talents to increase God's glory, or further the work of his kingdom?

Do you think God is as harsh as the master in the story? What sort of Father does Jesus show us?

What are you waiting for in your life or faith at the moment? (Only share if you're comfortable doing so)

How do these passages make you feel? And what do you think they mean for us today?

ACTIVITY – 'prayer journal'

Keeping a **prayer journal** can help us to look back and see where God has answered prayer. Over time, we'll see how long we've had to wait. Prayer doesn't always get an instant response, but answers come in God's time. It can be encouraging to see that God remembers prayers we might have even forgotten. *Think about keeping a prayer journal at home, or for the group.*

PRAYING TOGETHER

*It is important to finish the session by praying or worshipping together. Group members may like to share subjects for prayer. You may find a way that enables everyone to participate, or perhaps the group leader could sum-up and bring everyone's prayers to God. Finish with **The Lord's Prayer**.*