

Biblical Perspectives: Being Ready for the Bridegroom

By Carrie Cavanaugh

¹"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ²Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!'

⁷"Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

⁹" '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.'

¹⁰"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.

¹¹"Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

¹²"But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

¹³"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

The parable of the Ten Virgins teaches us a great deal about what God expects of us as we wait for

the day of His return. As a leader of a Christian organization, this parable has implications for the decisions you make regarding your organization's resources.

Like many of Christ's parables, the lesson is shocking, as God's ways are not our ways, but that is all the more reason for us to take a closer

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look. The parable, at first blush, is a glimpse into one of the joyous times in life—a wedding. This, I believe is the first lesson we are to take away from this parable. Christians, and even more so Christian leaders, need to live in anticipation of the glorious return of our Savior. It's all too easy to lose this sense of excitement in the midst of the mundane activities of our lives, but the reality is that we "do not know the day or the hour" of His return. This view of life should result in joy, hope, intentionality and, as we will see, wise use of our resources.

The story, which should have been about celebration and anticipation fulfilled, instead reveals a startling truth about what is required of

those who will get to enjoy fellowship with the Bridegroom. The "wise" virgins' intense longing to be ready to greet the bridegroom resulted in a rather harsh reply to the foolish virgins in their midst. They would not share their oil because they knew that they must be prepared or they would lose out on that which was worth more to them than anything else.

As Christians we are called to kindness—it is one of the fruits of the Spirit! But this story reveals that we must use discernment in applying that kindness. That is, our kindness should be subservient to God's calling. Also, it would do us well to consider what is truly kind. For, even God's love for us is often in the form of "tough love" and is experienced as painful trials in our lives.

God's sovereign hand is at work in the world today in part through a challenging economy. This is an opportunity for the leaders of Christian organizations to reexamine their use of funds, staff gifting and time. In the past we were able to get away with being "kind" where now it is essential to be "wise" and do what must be done in order to be ready for the Bridegroom. In this light, layoffs and program cuts can be God-glorifying.

This parable directly precedes the parable of the talents and for good reason. The two are related. God

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expects us to be good stewards of what He has given us. Although it is easy to grow lackadaisical, the Bible portrays our lives as times of urgency as we make the most of every moment (Ephesians 5:16) and every asset at our disposal (Matthew 25:14-30) for the furthering of the kingdom. This spiritual battle is not one of desperation—for we know the victory has already been secured—but nonetheless, one of massive significance. Let us live as such. Let us lead as such.

As I mentioned before, we need to ask what true “kindness” is. Sometimes it means letting someone go so that not only your organization can better fulfill God’s calling, but also so that they can better fulfill God’s calling on their life. This may be painful for a time, but will be a blessing for everyone involved in the long run.

As we look at God’s word, there is story after story of how tough decisions are necessary in order to follow God’s calling—Abraham parting from Lot and again being ready to sacrifice Isaac are just two instances in the life of one man. We are also told to “throw off everything that hinders . . . and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1).

In conclusion, it would be unrealistic not to be discouraged by a layoff or cutback in programs, but when that is what we are called to

do, we are to, “forget[] what is behind and strain[] toward what is ahead, . . . press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). This is not deluding ourselves into forgetting about difficult decisions, but rather not allowing discouragement to hold us back. We must keep perspective on what is of greatest worth—just as the wise virgins of Jesus’ parable.