

March 20

Matthew 25:1-13 (NIV) ¹ "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The 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. ⁸ The 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.

After thinking about the situation and what her friends had said, Barbara decided to remain with the study group. Taking part of Phil's responsibilities was not that much of a burden, and she was benefitting from the group's interaction and input. That decision gave her a freedom that she had not had when she was all worked up about Phil. Phil continued to attend the meeting, but he was still remiss in upholding his share of the study material. Nevertheless, the people in the group saw their understanding of the material grow and their grades improve – all except Phil. Barbara mentioned this to the group as they waited for Phil to arrive. The other students said they had no problem sharing their study material with him; however, Phil had the responsibility to study it and apply it.

At first reading of this parable, we might wonder why the five virgins who had brought extra oil did not share with the five who had run out. That does not seem like the Christian thing to do, especially after the verse we studied yesterday. When Jesus instructed us to look out after the interests of others and to help when we could does not remove personal responsibility. Jesus tells us that He is coming back and that each of us needs to be ready. People help me a great deal, but I am responsible for my continued growth. I am responsible for storing up my own oil. As much as Carol loves me, she cannot give me her oil. It is extremely difficult for a marriage to work when only one person commits to it. Helping one another does not negate our individual responsibilities to nurture our relationships with Jesus.