

LEAD! C.12 Joy in the Journey

In Which We Begin to Pursue the End...

This is the final lesson in our series, but hopefully just the beginning of your journey in understanding what it means to lead others -- and yourself -- into the "name" of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As we proceed to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (cf [Philippians 2:12](#)), it is essential to continually rejoice (cf. [Philippians 4:4](#)), because the "joy of the Lord is our strength" (cf. [Nehemiah 8:10](#)). We may occasionally become discouraged when we realize we will never reach complete perfection, either in our discipline, our character, or even our theology (cf. [1 Corinthians 13:9](#)). On the other hand, the good news is that this means we will always have room for improvement!

This course has tried to give you the basics, but there are even more wonderful truths about Christ to be understood, deeper works of the Holy Spirit to be experienced, and greater glories for the Father to be won.

May we persevere together in that pursuit until the day we are all finally united with our Beloved Bridegroom, to celebrate His matchless "name" for all eternity.

Memory Verse: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." -- [Matthew 25:13](#) (NKJV)

Assigned Reading

1. [Richard Foster: *Celebration of Discipline*](#)
 - 13. Celebration
2. [Donald Whitney: *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*](#)
 - 13. Perseverance
3. [Eugene Peterson: *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*](#)
 - 8. Joy: "We Laughed, We Sang"
 - 11. Perseverance: "They Never Could Keep Me Down!"
 - A Long Obedience: Epilogue
4. [Ruth Haley Barton: *Sacred Rhythms*](#)
 - 9. A Rule of Life: Cultivating Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation

Anecdote

Read [Deuteronomy 34](#). In the end, did Moses succeed or fail in what God called Him to do?

Bible

[Matthew 25](#)

Our final study involves three sober parables of eternal significance, though it starts with an apparently festive occasion:

[25:1](#)"Then the [kingdom](#) of heaven shall be likened to ten [virgins](#) who took their [lamps](#) and went out to meet the [bridegroom](#).

This presumably refers to a marriage custom of the day where the bride's unmarried friends and relations carry lamps to illuminate the bridegroom's coming.

[2](#)Now five of them were [wise](#), and five were [foolish](#). [3](#)Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no [oil](#) with them, [4](#)but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

As is common in traditional cultures, things ran behind schedule:

[5](#)But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. [6](#)"And at midnight a cry was [heard]: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'

Which led to a last minute frenzy:

[7](#)Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. [8](#)And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us [some] of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' [9](#)But the wise answered, saying, '[No], lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.'

That goes hard on those who were not prepared:

[10](#)And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the [wedding](#); and the door was shut.

[11](#)"Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' [12](#)But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'

A shockingly severe response to such a minor act of negligence! Jesus surely chose such a dramatic picture deliberately, to impress upon the disciples that they would have to wait much longer than they thought for His return -- and to prepare accordingly [C.1]:

[13](#)"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

More, He has something vital to tell us about how to occupy ourselves until then:

[14](#)"For [the kingdom of heaven is] like a man traveling to a far country, [who] called his own [servants](#) and delivered his [goods](#) to them.

[15](#)And to one he gave five [talents](#), to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own [ability](#); and immediately he went on a journey.

This parable inspired the modern sense of the word "talent", referring to a person's God-given skills and abilities [C.2]. What we do with those talents, though, is up to us:

16Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents.

17And likewise he who [had received] two gained two more also.

18But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money.

Nevertheless, we will be held accountable for that, even if (as before) there is a long delay:

19After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

20"So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' 21His lord said to him, 'Well [done], good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

22He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' 23His lord said to him, 'Well [done], good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Note that:

- Both servants earned as much as they were given
- They are called "good and faithful" for doing so
- They receive the same reward: to be responsible for much
- This is tied to "the joy of their Lord" [C.3]

This is in sharp contrast to what happens with the third servant:

24"Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

25And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, [there] you have [what is] yours.'

Rather than using his talent, the third servant:

1. critiques the character of the lord
2. hides in fear
3. returns exactly what he was given

This does not impress the lord:

[26](#)"But his lord answered and said to him, 'You [wicked](#) and [lazy](#) servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.

[27](#)So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.

Intriguingly, the master doesn't so much deny the accusation as use it to judge the actions of the servant -- showing that he was not so much "afraid" as "wicked and lazy." In other words, the servant didn't merely fear the master's strictness; he actively resented his master's lordship, and disdained the thought of earning any sort of return for his master. [C.4]

For which he ends up paying a steep price:

[28](#)So take the talent from him, and give [it] to him who has ten talents.

[29](#)For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

[30](#)And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Lest we miss the implications, Jesus proceeds directly to a more personal story of judgement:

[31](#)"When the Son of Man comes in His [glory](#), and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

[32](#)All the [nations](#) will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides [his] sheep from the goats.

[33](#)And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

The term 'nations' ([ethnos](#)) is synonymous with "Gentiles", which is why some commentators interpret this as foretelling how Christ will judge those who don't know God. Others see it as more a parable than a prophecy. Regardless, this reveals something essential that Jesus wants us to know about the nature of His Kingdom:

[34](#)Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

[35](#)for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; [36](#)I [was] naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

Importantly, the sheep don't seem to be consciously aware of how their virtuous acts impact Jesus:

[37](#)"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed [You], or thirsty and give [You] drink?

[38](#)When did we see You a stranger and take [You] in, or naked and clothe [You]?

[39](#)Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

Apparently they served the needy without realizing they were serving Jesus:

[40](#)And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did [it] to one of the least of these My brethren, you did [it] to Me.'

Unlike the goats:

[41](#)"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: [42](#)for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; [43](#)I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'

Who share the same ignorance:

[44](#)"Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'

But not the same compassion:

[45](#)Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do [it] to one of the least of these, you did not do [it] to Me.'

And thus experience a very different fate. [C.5]

[46](#)And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

This is the Scriptural counterpoint to the Book of Life from [Revelations 20](#). At one level, it doesn't matter what we have done as long as our names are written with Jesus

in the Book of Life. Yet in this passage, our eternally destiny appears intimately wrapped up with how we treat others. What is the 'real' answer?

Different scholars reconcile these teachings in various ways, but for our purposes the most important fact is that Jesus Himself taught on both sides of the issue. If so, that must mean He wants us to keep both in mind as we move forward in the Christian life.

As important as it is to think properly about the "name" of God -- and it is crucial! -- it still isn't enough (cf [James 2:19](#)). Our heart, soul, mind and strength need to be baptized into every aspect of the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as our character is conformed step by step into His image through His gift of the spiritual disciplines.

As we do so, we will experience His love transforming the way we relate to our brothers our sisters, our neighbors, and even our enemies. We will know the joy of saving our lives by losing them, and His life filling us as we die to our own pride and sin. We will feel the exhilarating freedom of casting off the world's wisdom for God's seeming foolishness (cf. [1 Corinthians 1:25](#)), as we inherit the glory prepared for us since before time began.

May you run with endurance the race that is set before you, until the day we all celebrate our final victory at the wedding feast of the Lamb. Which no eye has seen, but our hearts already know, and look forward to with joy and longing.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Conversation

1. What might be the "oil" we need to bring with us as we wait for the Lord's return?
2. Which do you consider your greatest talent? Do you feel you have many or few?
3. In God's economy, how does "responsibility" relate to "joy"?
4. Do you sometimes feel God is a "hard master"? Why or why not?
5. Using Scripture, how would you respond to someone who claims it doesn't matter what you do as long as you believe the right things about Jesus?

Decision

- **Repentance:** What talents have you been hiding that God wants to use?
- **Action:** How can you give back to God for all He has given you?
- **Worship:** Thank God for how He has revealed Himself to you during this study.

Explore More

- [Judgment, Last – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [The Parable of the Ten Virgins](#)
- [The Parable of the Talents](#)
- [One For Truth: The Sheep and the Goats: Parable or Prophecy?](#)
- [YouTube – The Sheep and The Goats – Keith Green](#)

For the Future

Graduation Verse: *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen."* -- [2 Peter 3:18](#) (NKJV)

References

1. **Blue Letter Bible.** "[Matthew 25](#) - New King James Version." Blue Letter Bible. 1996–2009. 17 May 2009. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?t=NKJV&b=Mat&c=25> >
2. **[New King James Version](#) (NKJV)** Copyright © 1982 by [Thomas Nelson, Inc.](#)

