

Session 6 Cultivating the Oil of Intimacy with Jesus

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

Here in Matthew 25, we're looking at the revelation of Jesus as the Bridegroom, and the cultivation of intimacy before Him as He reveals Himself as the Bridegroom God. Jesus has finished His public ministry and He's only talking in private now to His disciples in Matthew 24–25. He has the disciples alone and He's giving them His final teaching before the upper room discourse and the road to the cross. In this final, private teaching before the upper room and the last supper, Jesus reveals Himself to them as the Bridegroom God. He's actually talking to His leaders about leadership. In contemporary context, He's talking specifically to leaders in the generation in which He returns, the generation of the Lord's return to earth.

JESUS CONNECTED END TIMES TO INTIMACY WITH GOD

Paragraph A. Jesus connected preparation for the end times to intimacy with God. Again, He's talking to leaders—to the apostles—and He's talking about the subject of leaders, particularly in the end times. The focus of this parable is that He reveals Himself as the Bridegroom God. In essence, He says, "I am the Bridegroom God, and in that generation My leaders will be able to encounter Me. They will be able to have a revelation of Me and the tenderness of My heart."

THE REVELATION OF JESUS IS THE UNVEILING OF HIS HEART

The revelation of Jesus as the Bridegroom is really an unveiling of His heart: His tenderness, His passion, and the desire that He has for His people. In Matthew 24–25, Jesus is teaching on the end times. All of Matthew 24 is about the subject of the end times, and here He lays out His most in-depth teaching by applying it in three parables focused on leadership. So, in these two chapters He's giving one teaching. There's a chapter break between chapters 24 and 25, but in that context Jesus didn't say, "Stop! Now we're starting chapter 25." As far as the apostles were concerned, it was one Bible study: Jesus teaching them about the end times. He gives them three parables applying His end-time lessons to leadership. These parables are meant, of course, for all 2,000 years of church history, but they have a particular application to the generation in which the Lord returns.

THE DARKEST, MOST GLORIOUS HOUR OF HISTORY

Paragraph B. There will be the greatest revival and the greatest pressures in all of history. The greatest outpouring of the Spirit and the greatest pressures, both the positive and the negative, will happen simultaneously in the generation in which the Lord returns. The Church will see great victories; there will be a great harvest. We're seeing the harvest right now. But this harvest is going to grow far larger in scope. We believe that the Lord will bring a billion new converts into the kingdom. They're going to impact the seven different spheres of society that are being talked about so much today. They will impact all those spheres of society, but at the same time, in various places throughout the world, darkness will increase even as the light is increasing.

People ask, "Is it going to get better or is it going to get worse?"

The answer is both. The light will get lighter and the darkness will get darker at the same time across the earth. There will be some geographic regions with tremendous breakthroughs of the glory of God, tremendous advancements of the kingdom, even in society as a whole. At the same time, there will be other geographic areas in the earth that will grow darker and darker. There will be strongholds of sin and wickedness greater than

any time in history. In Matthew 13:30, Jesus said the wheat and the tares would mature together at the end of the age. The wheat is good, and the tares are bad, but they both mature together fully at the end of the age.

JESUS GIVES THREE PARABLES

Paragraph C. After Jesus gives His teaching on the end times, throughout this particular teaching and in other times as well, He tells them He's going to come quickly. He's going to come suddenly and He's going to come quickly. He calls them to be faithful during the time of delay. He says, "I will come suddenly; I will come quickly. You don't know when." There's a time of delay. None of them knew it would be 2,000 years; they assumed it was within their lifetime. Jesus knew it would be a long time, but He didn't know it would be 2,000 years. Here Jesus is saying to the apostles, and then of course to all the generations throughout natural history, "Be faithful during My delay." He gives three parables to equip leaders to be faithful during the delay.

In parable one, which we won't examine, the point is that Jesus' delay is shorter than people expect. He says, "My delay may be sooner than you think." He gives a leadership lesson. In parable two, which we'll look at in a moment, Jesus' delay may be longer than the people expect. If it's longer than they expect, Jesus exhorts them to cultivate intimacy with Him and not to neglect their relationship with Him as their Bridegroom God. During the delay, the workload will increase; the revival will go forward, yet even in the work of the revival people will neglect their own personal relationship with the Lord. Jesus pictures it as oil in a lamp. He says, "If My delay is longer than you think, or longer than you're expecting, don't neglect the oil of your relationship with Me."

In parable three, which we're also not going to look at, Jesus' delay is harder than expected. The first parable is shorter than they expected, the second one longer than they expected, and in the third parable, His delay is harder than they expected. We're going to focus in on the second one: Jesus was calling them not to neglect intimacy with Him if, in fact, His delay was longer and the workload increased more than anticipated.

JESUS: BRIDEGROOM, KING, AND JUDGE

Paragraph D. The Bible makes it clear that in the generation in which the Lord returns the Holy Spirit will emphasize Jesus as Bridegroom, King, and Judge. There are many faces to Jesus' personality in ministry, but the Holy Spirit is going to bring into focus Jesus as the Bridegroom God, Jesus as King and Jesus as Judge. The challenge will be that there's no contradiction in Jesus as Bridegroom, Jesus as King, and Jesus as Judge. As a bridegroom, He's filled with desire for His people. As a King, He manifests His power. As the Judge, He has zeal to confront everything that hinders love. He will remove everything that gets in the way of love.

Some people, when they think of Jesus the Judge, think to themselves, "I don't want Jesus the Judge; I want Jesus the Bridegroom, the One with desire, or Jesus the King, the One with power." What we'll look at next week and touch on now is that in being Bridegroom, King, and Judge, there's no contradiction in His personality at all. The Scripture makes it clear that the Spirit is going to focus on these three dimensions of Jesus' personality, as well as Jesus' ministry to the Body of Christ. Tonight we're going to look at the parable that focuses on Jesus as the Bridegroom God.

HIS NUMBER ONE EXHORTATION: WATCH AND PRAY

Paragraph F. In the context of the end times, it's interesting, and even more than interesting—it's very significant—that the main teaching Jesus gave, His number one exhortation whenever He taught on the end times, was to watch. When I first began to read this, I discovered that even with the apostles, it's the same: not just Jesus, but the apostles as well would say exactly the same thing. When Jesus taught on the end times, He

didn't say, "Store up guns." He didn't say, "Go live in a cave." He didn't say, "Store up food and water." He said nothing like that. When He talks about this tremendous outpouring of power, and great crisis, it almost takes you aback. As the great Pastor that He is, Jesus the great Shepherd says, "Watch and pray." That's almost the only thing that He says.

CONNECTING WITH HIM IN THE DARKEST HOUR

When you look at that in context, you say, "Jesus, is that all You have to say about the greatest outpouring of the Spirit and the greatest crisis that the world will ever see? The only thing that You tell us, or at least the main thing that You tell us, is to watch and pray?" It almost seems impractical. We say, "Give us something practical, something that would really help us in that day."

To *watch* means to develop your heart-connection with the Lord. He's saying, "If you will develop a heart-connection with Me in that hour, I will tell you clearly out of that relational context what to do in any given situation." He doesn't give us details. Again, you would think, the greatest crisis in human history is coming; yet He says, "Pray more." That's what it means to *watch*.

HE WILL GIVE COURAGE AND INSIGHT TO DO ALL

We say, "Pray more? Give us more perspective."

He says, "I will. Pray more. Connect with Me and you'll have insight and courage to do everything that needs to be done in that day. If you are disconnected from Me, no matter how much insight you have, you'll end up stumbling in confusion. You'll end up stumbling in courage. You'll fall prey to fear, panic and confusion." He says, "Whatever you do, you must watch. You must connect with Me in your heart."

Here it is in Matthew 24:42 and Matthew 25:13. Twice in this one teaching, He gives them the same exhortation: "Watch, therefore." "Watch, therefore." In other words, "Develop a heart-connection. Develop your prayer life."

The apostles say the same thing. When Peter or Paul teach on the end times, they say, "Watch and pray."

Again, in the natural, you could be frustrated. You could say, "Come on! Come on, guys, tell us more. Don't just say, 'Watch and pray.' Give us more strategy. Give us more insight." Of course the logic is this: If you connect with the Lord, you'll have sufficient insight to know what to do in that hour, and you'll have the courage to be able to follow through, and the strength and resolve in your heart. He says each time, "Watch and pray. Watch and pray."

POSITIONING OUR HEARTS TO RECEIVE FROM HIM

Paragraph I. Again, the end times will be the time of the greatest revival and the greatest crisis, the greatest positive as well as the greatest negative. As we watch, what we must do is position ourselves to receive strength from the Holy Spirit. That's what happens through a relationship of watching. In other words, in developing that heart-connection with the Lord, we put ourselves in the position to receive strength from the Holy Spirit. Then He gives us the ability, by the power of God, to love Him and to love people in that hour of glory and that hour of crisis. By watching, we put ourselves in the place where we're empowered to obey God.

YOU LOVE OTHERS BETTER IF YOU'RE CONNECTED

I talk to some folks, and they think that if they take time to develop their prayer life, then it's time they could be investing in people. We all have that challenge. We all feel the tension. How much time do we put before the Lord and how much time do we invest in other things like relationships, work, or activities? No one can tell you, because it's different for every single person.

Here is the point I want to make: You will love people far better if you're connected to the Lord. If you take time to watch and pray, if you take time to develop intimacy with the Lord, you'll actually be a far better husband or wife, a far better father or mother, a far better pastor, a far better friend. Why? Because you'll be living with a different spirit. You'll be relating to people and serving them with a totally different type of spirit instead of one in burnout, in fear, in stress, and in all kinds of turmoil.

IN PRAYER, YOU COME TO LOVE OTHERS BETTER

People think if they spend time with the Lord, they're taking it away from a quality relationship, but the opposite is true. If you spend time with the Lord, you position yourself to love people with a far greater quality and a far greater consistency than if you're disconnected. As matter of fact, it's presumptuous to think that we can love well if we are disconnected from the Lord in our daily life. I'm talking about people who love Jesus. Many people love Jesus; they're born again, they're going to heaven when they die, they're in the kingdom now, but they live virtually disconnected. They live spiritually dull and in spiritual burnout. It really undermines their ability to love God, love people, love their families and serve the people they have a heart to serve.

I've compared it over the years to not taking time to put fuel in your car. Someone says, "I don't want to stop and fill my car up with fuel; that takes too much time. I'm going to skip the refuel time because I'm in a hurry and I really want to get where I'm going." Of course the car runs out of gas. Then they're pushing the car up the hill. A lot of people live their spiritual lives pushing their car up the hill because they don't want to take time to connect to the Lord. You'll save a whole lot more time by doing it God's way. It's not an issue of, "Do we have time to pray?" It's an issue of, "We don't have time not to."

When I say *pray*, I don't mean going down your prayer list. That's not what I mean by *prayer* in this particular context. I'm talking about taking time when we connect with the Lord, when we develop a dialogue with Him and feel His desire for us. It tenderizes our spirit; it energizes us with love and we don't live in burnout and fear the way we would if we didn't take that time. I'm not talking about prayer so much in the sense of praying for people. I'm talking about the kind of prayer that connects with His heart so that your spirit is energized throughout your life as the decades unfold.

LET GOD BE THE FUEL FOR YOUR HEART

I've been pastoring nearly thirty-five years now, and most believers I know live spiritually dull and spiritually burned out lives. They're sincere, they're trying to do well, but they live at the end of their strength, constantly frazzled, burned out, a bit confused, and always on the verge of quitting. I've encouraged them over the years to take a little time, connect with the Lord, and feel His heart. Let Him energize your heart. It will change the dynamics of the way you relate to people, the way you serve people, and the way you resist temptations. It will change the dynamics of your spiritual life if you take time to do this. You can't push that car up the hill because you don't want to take time to refuel it. You can't do that and live a successful life. You can't live a successful Christian life disconnected from the Lord in a practical, daily way. I'm not trying to be tough with people and say, "You had better get your connection with the Lord right or you're a bad person." What I am saying is that

you had better maintain your connection with the Lord, or you'll live constantly in spiritual dullness and burnout, and you'll never live effectively in your spiritual life. You won't love your family as well, you won't serve people as well, you won't love your friends as well, and you won't love your spouse as well. You'll have far less ability to engage yourself in those kinds of vital relationships.

THE TEN VIRGINS AS TYPES OF LEADERS

Matthew 25:1–2. Let's look at the parable itself now. It's a short parable. Jesus says, "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom" (Mt. 25:1). Jesus is talking about Himself. He's the One they're going to go out to meet. Verse 2: "Now five of them were wise and five were foolish." That's the introduction to the parable. Jesus is talking to the apostles. He's talking about leadership in all three parables. This is a leadership parable. He's talking about how leaders will relate to Jesus in the generation in which He returns. Of course this parable can be applied for 2,000 years, but it has its greatest application in that last hour of history.

EVERY BELIEVER STANDS BEFORE GOD AS A VIRGIN

He talks about ten virgins. Because of the gift of righteousness, every believer, when he or she comes to Jesus, stands before God as a chaste virgin from the biblical point of view. In 2 Corinthians 11:2, Paul tells us that Jesus came and took away our impurity as a free gift. He gave us His righteousness as a gift and He has given us a standing before the Father and before Himself as a pure virgin. *Pure* and *chaste* here are the same idea. No matter what you did, even if it was as recently as yesterday, by the power of the blood of Jesus, every single born-again believer stands before Him in purity, blameless before Him as His gift. This is true of every sincere believer who is warring against the issues in their life that are in compromise. They might be stumbling, but they're repenting, confessing it, and standing in the righteousness of Jesus. They stand as pure virgins before Him. All ten of these were virgins. He's talking about ten born-again believers here. That's the context of this parable.

TEN BELIEVERS WITH LAMPS THAT WENT OUT

Paragraph B. All ten of these believers have lamps. A lamp speaks of the ability to bring light to others. A lamp speaks of ministry. In other words, all ten of these believers have functioning ministries. They have light-bearing ministries. They bring light to others in a time of darkness. They're born-again believers and they have functioning ministries.

A GENERATION WILL KNOW THE BRIDEGROOM LOVE

Paragraph C. Notice that all ten of them went out to meet the bridegroom. At one time in their ministry, all ten of them had revelation of Jesus as the Bridegroom God. What I mean by, "had revelation of Jesus as a Bridegroom," is that they understood He was a God with deep desire for them; that He longed for partnership with them; and that He had tender and deep feelings for them. That's what the revelation of Jesus the Bridegroom is about: He's the God of the burning desire for His people. They had revelation of this. Throughout church history, there has never been a time when the Body of Christ, universally, has understood Jesus as the Bridegroom God. The Holy Spirit hasn't emphasized this revelation of Jesus in a universal way for 2,000 years. It's in the Bible that He's the Bridegroom God. It's in the Old Testament; it's in the New Testament. Jesus said it with His own lips several times. Here in this very parable, He's pointing to the truth that He's the Bridegroom God. Paul made the point several times. John made the point several times. In the Old Testament, it's validated and established, and likewise in the New Testament. It's biblical: Jesus is the Bridegroom God.

For 2,000 years of church history, the Holy Spirit has never emphasized this revelation of Jesus in a universal way. There have always been a few groups here and there throughout those 2000 years who saw this revelation of Jesus; but the majority did not. However, there's coming a time in history when the entire Body of Christ, worldwide, will see Jesus as the God of burning desire for them; the beautiful God. The very beauty He possesses is the beauty He imparts to His people. He is the God who loves us with all His heart and empowers us to love Him with all our hearts. The reason He wants us to love Him with all our hearts is because He loves us with all His heart. He wants us to be equally yoked to Him in love. The Holy Spirit, in one generation only, the generation of the Lord's return, universally, worldwide, will reveal Jesus as the Bridegroom God.

The Body of Christ knows Jesus as King. They know His power a little. They've heard of Jesus' judgments. They don't think about it much. They don't like His judgments—they don't appreciate them—but, in a technical sense, they know they exist. When it comes to the desire of His heart, this is an issue that's foreign to most believers, even today—and I mean people who love Jesus—it's an issue in which they are not yet established. Jesus the King, yes; Jesus the Judge, yes; Jesus the Bridegroom with desire—"Hmmm. I don't know that part..."

“THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE SAY, ‘COME!’”

The good news is this: The Holy Spirit will universally reveal this part of His heart to us in the generation in which He returns. Look at the passage here in Revelation 22:17. There's coming a time when the Spirit and the Bride will say, “Come!” The Body of Christ worldwide will be in a bridal identity, crying out, “Come, Lord Jesus!” “In a few weeks, we're going to look at this cry from Revelation 22: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ and really break it down. It's a very astounding and powerful prophecy. There are many facets and aspects to this prophecy. There's coming an hour before the Lord returns when the Body of Christ will be saying, in unity, as one, “Come, Lord Jesus! Come, Lord Jesus!” This is before He returns, by the way. He hasn't come back yet at the time of this prophecy. They will not only be crying out as the Body of Christ, but they will be in a bridal identity. They will understand Jesus as a Bridegroom God. I'm talking about all the saints in Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, Europe and all the islands of the earth. All the Body of Christ, before the Lord returns, will be under the anointing of the Spirit crying, “Come, Lord Jesus! Come, Lord Jesus!” They will be doing it with the revelation that He's their Bridegroom God and they are, in fact, His cherished Bride.

EARTH'S REVELATION OF THE BRIDEGROOM GOD

I have been paying attention to the subject of the Bride of Christ for a little over twenty years now. The Lord first called me to focus on this to some degree in 1988, twenty-two years ago. At the time, as I recall, very few people were talking about it. A few were; there were some books; a few people mentioned it here and there. I was researching it, and I couldn't find materials on Jesus the Bridegroom. I had research teams working and it was hard to find. There were some materials, for sure, but not many. Ten years later, the amount of materials increased dramatically. There were many worship songs, and many people were focusing on the Bride of Christ ten years after I began to do this. In other words I began to be aware of the fact that, “Wow, it's really increasing.”

Now, it's been another ten years since then. I'm telling you right now, it's not nearly 100 percent because many in the Body of Christ still don't think about it, but the increase is so rapid right now. Millions of believers are getting an understanding of this. God is sovereignly visiting people in the night and telling them, “I'm a Bridegroom God.” Or, He's visiting them and giving them passages. People all over the earth are telling their

stories about how God is awakening them to this reality. That is, in itself, a sign of the times: the very fact that, for the first time in history, millions of believers are paying attention to this. Again, there have always been a few. There's always been a little ministry here, or a group over there, focused on it. Never have there been millions, though. I want to tell you, in the next ten years and the ten years after that; this is going to increase even more rapidly than it has in the last twenty years. The Holy Spirit is causing this revelation to explode across the earth. He wants you to lay hold of it. He wants you to feel it. He wants you to share it. He wants you to sing it. He wants you to train people in it. That's where this is going. Wait and see: in the next ten, twenty, thirty years, if the Lord tarries, this revelation of the Bridegroom God is going to be exploding numerically around the world. Many are new to it, but they're hungry for it.

UNDERSTANDING HIM ISN'T KNOWING HIM

Paragraph C. Well, the point I'm making here in the introduction to this parable is that all ten of these ministries went out to see the bridegroom. In other words, they understood the bridegroom message. They were the teachers at the Bridegroom conference. When there was a Bride of Christ conference, they were the seminar teachers. They got it. They were the worship leaders who sang the Bridegroom songs. Here they are. They're all ready. They're virgins. They're standing before the Lord in purity by the gift of righteousness. They have lamps; they have ministries. They have revelation of Jesus as the Bridegroom God. They went out to meet Him. They understand this dynamic of their relationship to the Messiah.

SOON THE WHOLE BODY WILL SEE ITSELF AS A BRIDE

Paragraph D. Notice the very first word in verse 1 of Matthew 25: it says, "Then the kingdom of God shall be likened to ten virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom." *Then*. The question is, "When is then? When will the kingdom of God be like ministries encountering the Bridegroom God? When is this going to be?" If you look at verse 1 and then go back a verse, you're in Matthew 24, which is Jesus' main teaching on the end times. Jesus is essentially saying, "In the generation of My coming, in that generation, the whole kingdom of God will like people who understand that they're encountering the Bridegroom Messiah." We're approaching that hour of history now. I believe we're in the early days of that time when, *then*, everyone sees the kingdom of God as encountering the Bridegroom Messiah. I believe we're in the early days of it. We're not quite there yet; but I believe that in the next ten, twenty, thirty, forty years, if the Lord tarries, this is going to explode in a major way.

THE WISE BECOME FOOLS IF THEY NEGLECT INTIMACY

Paragraph E. Here is the point of this parable. Jesus' warning here is this: The wise can become foolish if they neglect to encounter intimacy with Jesus. The parable starts off with ten virgins. They all have burning lamps; they all have great ministries. They all have a connection with the Bridegroom God. Five of them became foolish. That's the point of this parable. It's possible to be sincere, to be connected, and yet to neglect your intimacy with God. In doing so, they stumbled into folly, which is what Jesus called being *foolish*. They're not unbelievers; they haven't lost their salvation. That's not what He's talking about. They move from having a functioning ministry to becoming foolish in that ministry. That's what happens.

IN THE TIME OF INCREASE WE CAN LOSE OUR WAY

I've watched it over the years; I've done it myself a few times. In seasons when I was going strong, I had a real sense of connection to the Lord. I had tenderness in my spirit before the Lord. I understood, to a small degree, His love and His desire for me. I responded with tender feelings. But then, I got busy in ministry; my ministry increased and grew. It's typically in the time of growth that we lose our way. Or, it could be a time of

disappointment, where we stumble into bitterness because of our disappointment, and we draw back and lose our connection with the Lord. Most often, though, it's in the time of increase.

When things are going well, the very prosperity and blessing of God creates busyness in our life. The very favor of God creates busyness and that busyness leads to not taking time to connect with the Lord. People end up neglecting this vital reality that actually defines them. It's the most important thing in their life, but a few months go by. Then a few years go by, and they look back and realize they lost the connection. I've had that happen to me a few times over the years. When it does, I don't even realize it's happening. Some months go by. Suddenly, my heart is dull. I don't have the tenderness I had in a former season. Then, the Lord wakes me up and I say, "Oh no! I've done it again; I got too busy again!" This happens even in a time of blessed ministry.

"BLESSED IS HE, WHO IS NOT OFFENDED IN ME"

The message of this parable is that the wise, the connected ones, can become foolish. That's the point of the parable. It's a warning. He says, "If My delay is longer than you think it is, and the work of the kingdom increases because of a great outpouring of the Spirit— because of the conflicts, some will get offended." Some will be so busy in the revival that they actually lose the connection they had in former days. All ten of these virgins had ministries; they had lamps and they were all connected to the bridegroom. They went out to meet Him. They were cultivating their bridegroom relationship at one time. Time goes by and five of them lose their focus. Again, I've done it myself a few times over the years. It's painful when it dawns on me that my spirit is dull; I'm not as responsive as I was a few months earlier.

JESUS DEFINES WISDOM AND FOLLY

Roman numeral III. "Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps" (Mt. 25:2–4).

This is a profound statement. It seems too simplistic. It seems like Jesus is being almost childishly simple in this. He says, "Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps" (Mt. 25:3–4). He says, "Here is the definition of a foolish virgin: They took their lamps, they took their ministry, but they forgot the oil. They forgot the connection of their heart to Me." That's the definition of what folly is. They took their ministry, but they didn't take time for the oil.

Look at verse 4: "But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps" (Mt. 25:4). What's going on here? Jesus said, "Here are ten ministries. Five of them focused on their lamp and forgot the oil. Five of them put the oil first, even before their lamp." Jesus said, "That's what defines wisdom and folly, right there."

Again, this seems too simplistic. We're thinking, "Jesus, are You sure? There ought to be more to being foolish than this."

Jesus says, "No, if they build their ministry and neglect their walk with God, I love them—but in My eyes, they're foolish. They're foolish if they bring their lamp first and neglect the oil." Yet, many ministries do that. They spend their time networking and increasing their ministry sphere while their heart with Him is decreasing. They end up with a bigger ministry, but a smaller heart, a smaller connection with the Lord. Jesus said, "If you do that, even though you're sincere, even though you love Me and I love you, you're foolish."

THE WISE VIRGINS WERE OCCUPIED WITH THE HEART

Verse 4. The second group, the wise virgins, took the oil first. They were first preoccupied with the connection of their heart. The oil speaks of the Holy Spirit inside of them connecting with God's heart. That's what the oil is. If you'll take the oil first, and if you'll make the oil—your connection with the Lord—your first priority, and your second priority is the increase of your ministry, then the Bible calls you wise. Again, this seems awfully simplistic.

We say, "Jesus, surely there's more to being wise and foolish than this?"

I'm sure Jesus would say, "There's more to it than that, but this really is the fundamental, core issue, right here."

THE OIL IS THE HOLY SPIRIT TOUCHING OUR HEARTS

Paragraph A. The oil speaks of the Holy Spirit's presence touching our hearts. I have a few sentences here that develop this idea of the oil. In paragraphs B and C I say what I said just a moment ago. One man builds his ministry. That's his number one focus: a bigger ministry. He doesn't care if he doesn't have time for God. The wise person does it exactly the opposite way.

DETERMINE NOW WHERE YOU'LL SET YOUR HEART

Again, I haven't always done it, but I determined years ago, many, many years ago, in my early twenties—I'm fifty-five now. It was over thirty years ago when the Lord first stirred me with this parable—I determined that I was always going to put the oil first. When I say, "Put the oil first," I don't mean saying, "Well, who cares about everyone else out there?" I only knew this: I could more effectively touch others if I had oil, if I had a vibrant spirit; if my spirit was alive and tender, then I would serve far better. I could sustain it, and I could impact people in a much deeper way. We have a lot of twenty-somethings here in this room. I want to encourage you, in your early twenties, do the thing that I did in my early twenties. Again, I didn't walk it out fully, but I set my heart toward it. Someone came along and taught me and said, "Do this."

I said, "OK, wow!" I hadn't even thought about it.

Number one, oil. Number two, grow my ministry. Oil first. Growing my ministry second. Not the other way around. The most natural way is to do it the other way around. Again, I've had failures when I've looked back after some months went by, and I'm thankful that the Lord got my attention before years went by. Even that's the grace of God. He would get my attention and I would repent. I called it a failure. I wouldn't rationalize it and make up some excuse.

I would say, "No, I blew it. I don't want to live foolishly. I want to live wisely."

IT TAKES TIME AND SACRIFICE TO GET OIL

If you do this, you'll have to pass up opportunities. In fact, you'll have to pass up many opportunities because it takes time to get oil. Getting oil means taking time to develop that dialogue in your heart with the Lord. It means taking time to grow in understanding His desire for you as a Bridegroom God. It takes time. You can't do that on the run. I found out years ago that I had to miss certain opportunities for growth. I missed certain social opportunities; I missed certain relational opportunities; I missed certain financial opportunities. Why? Because it took time to get oil. I didn't have time to get oil and do everything else to the fullest. It's important

that you understand this as you make those decisions. One year will turn to five, five will turn to ten, one decade will become two decades, and two decades will become three decades. Either you're wise or you're foolish throughout that period of time. I set my heart. I said, "I want to be wise; I'm not going to be foolish in these things."

JESUS MUST BE THE PRIMARY DREAM OF YOUR HEART

Paragraph D. I say this over and over, but it's worth repeating: Your relationship with Jesus needs to be the primary dream of your heart— not your ministry, or anything else. I'm only talking about ministry right now. I've told this story many times: When the Lord first spoke about IHOP-KC in 1983, He told us audibly to do twenty-four hour prayer. It was a surprising, even confusing, concept. I couldn't picture it. "Twenty-four-hour prayer with singers and musicians?" What? I didn't even like the idea, to be honest, but He spoke it.

I didn't say, "Wow!" I didn't like prayer. I went, "Arghh!" I gritted my teeth and said, "Yes, Lord." I didn't know we would have such great musicians and singers. I couldn't picture this.

He said, "Do it."

The Lord spoke audibly in 1983 and so we put a sign on the wall. For sixteen years, people would come by and see that sign on the wall. For most of those sixteen years—it took awhile for us to get that sign up— they would come by, see the sign on the wall and say, "What's that? Twenty-four-hour prayer in the spirit and tabernacle of David?"

I gave the same answer every time: "I don't know. It means twenty-four-hour prayer in the spirit of the tabernacle of David."

"Well, what does *that* mean?"

I would say, "I really, truly have no idea. It's something about praying all day with singers." That was all I could figure out. It's funny now because I really couldn't picture it.

Then they would ask me the second question: "When are you going to do it?"

I said, "I don't have a clue. Maybe in five years." I said that for sixteen years: "Maybe in five years..." I just got used to that answer. Five years was close enough that I had to believe for it, but far enough away that it didn't disturb me. I said, "Five years."

They said, "Oh, really."

I said, "Maybe some five years or so." I had no idea it would go on for sixteen years.

"IHOP-KC ISN'T MY DREAM, IT'S MY ASSIGNMENT"

Finally, IHOP-KC began. As you know, we've been going for eleven years now. The Lord has blessed it in certain numerical ways, and in some other ways as well. My friends came, because I've had a lot of friends. I was pastoring a 3,000-member church, and they're all over the city. Friends from everywhere would come through. A lot of the former members of the church I had when I pastored here in Kansas City come to visit

IHOP–KC. They usually sit in the back and wave at me. I'll say 'Hi' to them. Inevitably, they'll say a phrase.

I have an average of a friend a week, a visitor from the past, come through IHOP–KC and say, "Wow, this is exciting!" And then they say this—I hear it regularly—"Your dream finally came true!"

I tell them the same thing every time: "No, my dream didn't come true because of IHOP–KC." That confuses them. I say, "No, IHOP–KC isn't my dream; IHOP–KC is my assignment. My dream is having an anointed relationship with Jesus. That's my dream. My dream is the anointing to walk in the first commandment. The ability to love God with all my heart by the power of God is my dream. That's what I'm going to take into eternity with me. IHOP–KC isn't my dream, it's my assignment."

IF MINISTRY IS YOUR DREAM, IT WILL BURN YOU OUT

I want to say this: If your ministry is your dream, your ministry will bruise your heart severely. It will burn you out. If your ministry is your big dream, it will bruise you and break you and burn you out completely. I'm not trying to be critical. I'm trying to help you not buy into it. I hear preachers on TV and in different places say, in essence, you can be rich, powerful, anointed, famous, and everything else you want to be.

They say, "Yes, yes; I want to be rich and famous—but all for the glory of God—of course..."

The goal to be rich, famous, and powerful, to change the world and everything else, becomes their dream. I tell you, that's a snare and a trap. That has to be only your assignment. Even though God promises you that, it's still a promise about your assignment. Your number one dream must be you and Him: Him touching you, you feeling His love, and you returning it back with all your heart. There's nothing more powerful in the world than to feel the love of God and have the ability to love Him with all of your heart. That's the most powerful way to live.

"NOTHING CAN TOUCH THE DREAM OF MY HEART"

I tell the people who say that, "No! No. My dream isn't IHOP–KC. No. If IHOP–KC gets really big and really famous, my dream isn't helped out at all. My dream isn't fulfilled if IHOP–KC gets really big. If IHOP–KC crashes and burns and goes away, my dream isn't affected one bit. Not at all. It's only my assignment."

No one can touch my dream. No one. No demon. No ministry. No increase or decrease can touch the dream of my heart.

I'm just going to end with that. I felt so good about that, so I'm just going to end there. You can read the rest of the parable, the rest of the notes, on your own.