

# Door Shut or Open

This week's texts remind us there is nothing casual about living as a witness to God's liberation and justice. It is a daily commitment, shared by each generation, with a readiness to respond, trusting the assurance this is the door to realm-of-God life?

## Focus scripture: Matthew 25:1–13

Matthew 25:1–13 is directed to the early community of faith and to believers of every age who struggle with the discontinuity between the realm of God's transformational-promise and lived reality. The realm of God preached and lived by Jesus raised expectations for both personal and social transformation. Yet, when the gospel of Matthew is written some 30 to 40 years after the disciples proclaimed the resurrection of Christ, it appears to most that little, if anything, has changed. The Roman empire is still in charge. The poor continue to be exploited. Roman imperial military might has a firm grip on the populace.

What do you do when the realm of God's promise of personal and social transformation goes unfulfilled? Whether the challenge faced is that of the early Christians, a contemporary struggle with drug addiction, health insurance, immigration, climate change, or any number of personal and social issues, how does one trust, much less live into the promised transformation when nothing seems to change?

It may be half-hearted, but the early Christians to whom the gospel of Matthew is first directed still hold hope that the transformative promise of liberation, justice, and compassion is possible. The notion that those claiming to be followers of Jesus might, like the foolish maidens, be shut out of the realm of God's promise is as discomfiting to these early Christians as it for us today. Yet this is what this parable claims: "The door is shut."

The message of the women waiting is reminiscent of the Woody Guthrie song "You gotta walk that lonesome valley, You gotta walk it by yourself, Nobody here can walk it for you..." Participation in the transformative work of the realm of God only happens when we, as individuals and as communities of faith, are prepared to do the transformative work of liberation, justice, and compassion. No one else can prepare it for us. It is, for example, never enough to put a statement in one's bulletin or to pass a resolution saying

you are welcoming. Participation in the realm of God means doing the hard work in advance before a stranger or guest ever appears. It is never enough to say we support diversity, but then neglect to do the hard work demanded by racial justice.

The message to Christians of every age is that the transformative moment for realm-of-God change will come in its own time. Half-hearted or half-prepared, will never do. If we fail to do the work, we will miss the opportunity when it arrives. Expect delays, but be ready. For those who prepare, their light will shine bright, and the door to God's realm will be open.

**Joshua 3:7–17** is ripe with internal tensions. On the one hand, it embraces an imperial theology of domination with a divinely sanctioned genocidal story of eliminating people who presently reside in the land. On the other hand, it calls for communities of liberation to be a faithful witness to a God whose liberation and justice are for all. Ultimately, it is up to each person and community to decide the nature of the God they choose to follow and the type of the world for which they are preparing.

**Psalm 78:1–7** invites us to experience our lives and faith in relationship both to those who have gone before and those who go after. Each generation has a responsibility to share the story of liberation and justice they have received.

In **1 Thessalonians 2:9–13**, we are reminded that there is no place where hope no longer resides, including death. The promise of God's liberation, justice, and love unite us in life and death.

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There is a well-known gospel refrain that goes "they will know we are Christians by our love." An alternative refrain might read, "They will know we are witnesses by our light." This week's texts call us to be witnesses to that light and live by the hope it provides.



## Focus scripture Matthew 25:1–13

**Additional scriptures**  
**Joshua 24:1–3a, 14–25**  
**Psalm 78:1–7**  
**1 Thessalonians**  
**4:13–18**



*Seasons of the Spirit*  
is based on semi-  
continuous readings of the  
*Revised Common Lectionary*.

**Spirit of liberation,  
you have called us  
to be witnesses to  
your compassion  
and justice. Yet we  
grow impatient  
and discouraged  
because so little  
seems to change  
and our efforts feel  
inconsequential.  
Help us maintain  
the joy, enthusiasm  
and commitment  
required so that  
we might always  
be ready to reflect  
your love when the  
opportunity comes  
our way. Amen.**

**Lection Connection**  
links current events  
with this week's  
scriptures. Go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and  
click on the link.

## The Focus for Ages 3–5

Young children live in the present and are not very patient when they have to wait. Even preparing to do something they want to do can be frustrating for them. They prefer to be spontaneous, but they are familiar with having to prepare for some things, for example dressing for outside play, celebrating a birthday, and going to bed. They are beginning to discover consequences experienced because of choices that they make. They may notice that many choices – even small ones related to preparations – mean saying yes to one thing while saying no to others.

As the children participate in the story-telling, they will see very clearly that there are choices and there are consequences, even for bridesmaids. The focus of the story will draw attention to the fact that the bridesmaids had an important task to do in bringing light to the wedding. The Respond activities provide children with an opportunity to reflect on how they can choose to shine in loving ways during everyday activities. Pray for the children as they become more aware of the importance of the choices they make and the opportunities to grow in faith that those choices may provide.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Matthew 25:1–13, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 57).
- ❑ Set a worship space with green cloth, candle, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Songbook*, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Music CD*, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

### Gather

- ❑ Bring "Gathering song" (on resource sheet "[Additional Songs and Poems](#)," p. 76) or "God Is Like" (p. 9 on *SGF Songbook*, #5 on *SGF Music CD*).
- ❑ Bring a plate of different kinds of fruit; option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).

### Engage

- ❑ Bring blanket, resource sheet "[Who Is Ready?](#)" and image of the bridesmaids from poster [Storytelling Resources #3](#), folded in half.

- ❑ Bring chant, "Ten Young Bridesmaids" (on resource sheet "[Additional Songs and Poems](#)," p. 76).

### Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Guest speaker:** invite a volunteer who helps prepare the sanctuary for worship to come and speak with children, bringing some items used to set the worship space.
- ❑ **Helping hands:** prepare a booklet for each child by folding three sheets of paper in half, adding a cover made from copies of resource sheet "[Helping Hands](#)," and stapling together along folded edge.
- ❑ **Lamps:** modelling clay or play dough (see recipe in *Virtual Resource Booklet*, in Library at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca)), yellow flame shapes cut from poster board; optional: clear marbles

### Bless

- ❑ Bring "Blessing song" (on resource sheet "[Additional Songs and Poems](#)," p. 76) or song, "We Are the Church" (p. 26 in *SGF Songbook*; #19 on *SGF Music CD*).

For groups consisting mostly of three-year-olds, supplemental resources can be downloaded from the Library at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).  
user name: spirit  
password: child



November 8, 2020

# Door Shut or Open

## Scripture

Matthew 25:1–13

**FOCUS** To confirm that we make choices every day that help us shine out in loving ways

## Gather

**Welcome** each child, saying “Hello, *(child’s name)*, we’re happy you’re here.”

### Opening ritual

**Gather** around the worship space. Say,

**The colour green reminds us  
to grow in God’s way** *(point to the green cloth).*

**The Bible is a book of stories about God  
and of people who loved God** *(point to Bible).*

**The light of the candle reminds us  
of God’s love** *(light the candle).*

**Sing** “Gathering song” (p. 76) or “God Is Like” (p. 9 on *SGF Songbook*, #5 on *SGF Music CD*).

**Pray** Loving God,  
thank you for this place.  
Thank you for stories  
that tell us about your love. Amen.

Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

### Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

#### ☐ Puppet conversation

**Priscilla:** Hi, everybody. I learned something about choices yesterday.

**Leader:** What happened, Priscilla?

**Priscilla:** When I kept on playing instead of going outside when my mother called me, I missed seeing a rainbow. I wish I’d made a different choice. Girls and boys, when have you made a choice to do something? *(Encourage responses, then pass a plate of fruit around the group, inviting them to choose one piece to eat.)*

**Leader:** Sometimes when we choose something it doesn’t end up the way we expect. Today’s story is about some women who had choices to make. Some were happy with their choices and some ended up being sad about their choices. *(Say goodbye to Priscilla.)*

- ☐ **Making choices** Pass the plate of fruit around the group and invite each child to choose one piece to eat. Ask children about other times when they are able to choose (such as what toy to play with, or which library book to take out). Mention that sometimes our choices don’t end up the way we expect. Explain that today’s Bible story is about some women who had to make some choices.

## Engage

### Before the story

Spread the blanket on the floor, gather in a circle, and invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and open it to the gospel of Matthew. Explain that this part of the Bible has stories about Jesus and stories that Jesus told. In this week's story, Jesus talks about making choices and being prepared.

### The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Who Is Ready?](#)," based on **Matthew 25:1–13**, and the image of the group of

bridesmaids, from the poster [Storytelling Resources #3](#) to tell the story.

### After the story

**Chant** Lead the group in the chant, "[Ten Young Bridesmaids](#)" (p. 76).

**Poster ritual** Attach the two groups of bridesmaids, using reusable adhesive, to the middle of a sheet of mural paper. Then invite children to name some ways that we can choose to let our lights shine and write these in flame shapes around the image.

## Respond

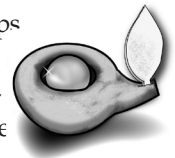
Choose from the following activities:

- ☐ **Guest speaker** Five bridesmaids were prepared and could light the way for the bridegroom. Every week, people prepare our worship space to welcome us and help us to worship. Invite your visitor to explain the choices related to setting the worship space, especially the colours. Display some items used, and encourage children to examine them, and ask questions about the sanctuary space.
- ☐ **Helping hands** We make choices each day that help us shine out in loving ways. Distribute the prepared booklets made with the resource sheet "[Helping Hands](#)" and read the cover message to the children. Invite them to decorate the figure as



themselves. Help them trace the outline of their hands on the inside pages. They can choose one of the "helping hands" and tear it out to give to someone each time they want to help.

- ☐ **Lamps** Oil lamps can be visual reminders of the story, and help us to remember that our choices do make a difference. Give children some play dough or modelling clay and encourage them to play with it. Then, demonstrate how to roll the dough into a ball, press with a finger to form a cavity, and pinch one end together to make a spout. Help them make their lamps and press poster board flames into the spouts. Option: press clear marbles into the cavities and imagine that it is oil.



## Bless

**Gather** in the worship space and light the candle.

**Pray** Thank you, God,  
for the bright light of your love,  
shining in us. Amen.

**Blessing** Lead the group in the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 76) or the song, "We Are the Church" (p. 26 in *SGF Songbook*, #19 on *SGF Music CD*).

**Send** each child out with the words, "(Child's name), God's love shines in you."

## Reflect

What kinds of choices did the children talk about? How well are they grasping that choosing one thing means not choosing others? What kinds of choices are you able to give the children when you are together?



### Story Tip

This story uses the technique of singing up (or down) a scale to reinforce the “up” and “down” choices made by the bridesmaids.

## Who Is Ready?

(based on Matthew 25:1–13)

*(Have the illustration of the bridesmaids [folded in half], from the poster [Storytelling Resources #3](#), nearby. Encourage children to join you in singing up or down the scale each time as indicated.)*

Long ago Jesus told a story about ten bridesmaids. *(Sing up the scale.)* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

The bridesmaids took their oil lamps and went to a wedding. Their lamps would help light the way for the bridegroom. Five of the bridesmaids chose to bring some extra oil for their lamps in case they needed it. *(Show the five bridesmaids with their lamps lit, singing up the scale.)* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

They had to wait a long time for the bridegroom to come. They waited and waited. Soon they all fell asleep waiting. At midnight they woke up. The bridegroom was coming! But, oh no, their lamps had run out of oil and there was no light. *(Show the five bridesmaids with their lamps unlit, singing down the scale, counting each one twice.)* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

The bridesmaids with extra oil were prepared. They lit their lamps again. *(Show the five bridesmaids with their lamps lit, singing up the scale.)* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

The bridesmaids without any extra oil weren't prepared. They couldn't light their lamps again. *(Show the five bridesmaids with their lamps unlit, singing down the scale.)* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

“Please give us some of your oil,” they said to the other five bridesmaids.

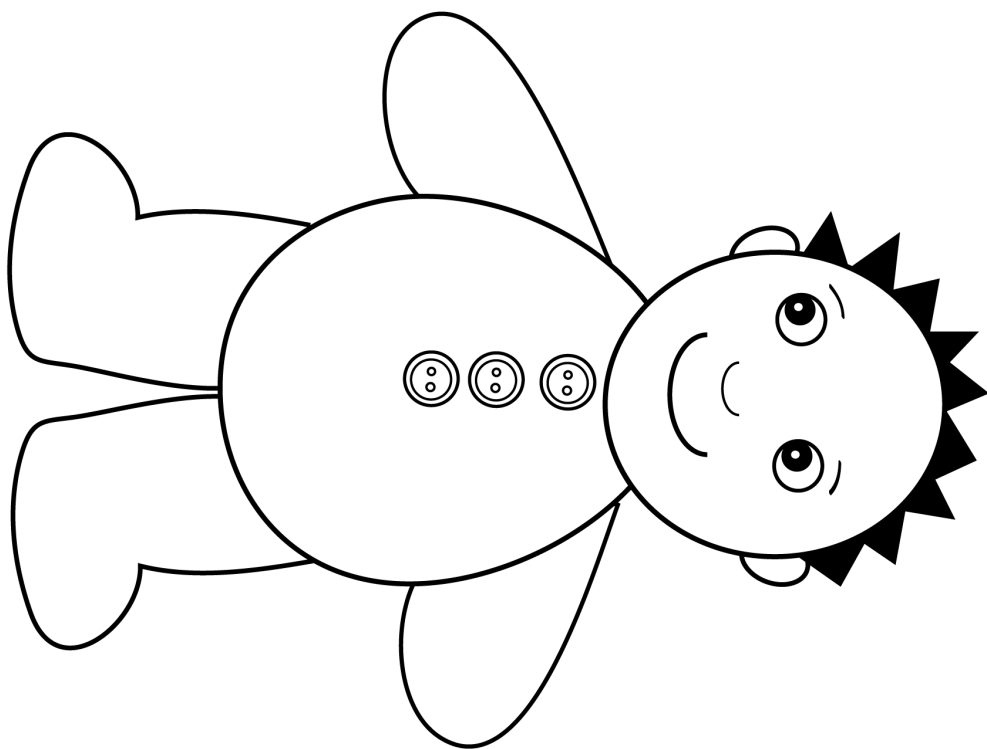
“We're sorry, but we don't have enough oil for both our lamps and yours,” the others replied. “You'll have to go and buy some for yourselves.”

While the bridesmaids with no oil went shopping the bridegroom arrived. The five bridesmaids who were prepared went into the wedding with their lamps shining. *(Show the five bridesmaids with their lamps lit, singing up the scale.)* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

By the time the other five bridesmaids got back, the wedding had already started and they couldn't go in. They were not prepared and they missed the wedding. *(Show the five bridesmaids with their lamps unlit, singing down the scale.)* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.



# Helping Hands



When I ask you to tear out a hand,  
I'm making a choice to do what I can.



# Additional Songs and Poems

## Welcome song

(tune: "London Bridges")

Welcome, welcome, we are here!  
Clap your hands! Shout a cheer!  
We'll sing and pray and learn today,  
to live and grow in God's good way.

## Parting poem

Where do we see God? (*Shrug shoulders.*)  
Let's look all around. (*Shade eyes with hand.*)  
God's love is there, shining through,  
in me (*point to self*) and in you (*point to others*).

Where do we find God? (*Shrug shoulders.*)  
Let's look all around. (*Shade eyes with hand.*)  
God's love can be found,  
the whole wide world around (*spread arms wide*).

## God Is with Us

(tune: "B-I-N-G-O")

God's with me and (*point to self*).  
God's with you and (*point to another*).  
God is with us always (*make a circle with arms*).  
Yes, yes, when we love (*clap for each word*),  
Yes, yes, when we care (*clap for each word*),  
Yes, yes, when we help (*clap for each word*),  
God's with us every day (*place hands over heart*).

## Gathering song

(tune: "Jesus Loves Me")

Thank you for this lovely day (*arms held wide*).  
Thank you for the ways to pray (*hand together*).  
Thank you for the friends we see (*wave to each other*).  
Thank you for your love for me (*hug self*).  
Yes, God, we thank you (*hands out, palms up*).  
Yes, God, we thank you (*hands out, palms up*).  
Yes, God, we thank you (*hands out, palms up*).  
We thank you every day (*hands over heart*).

## Blessing song

(tune: "The Wheels on the Bus")

Now let's go out to share God's love,  
share God's love, share God's love.  
Every day, in every way,  
let's share God's love with all.  
(Repeat if desired, substituting the last line with phrases, such as "Let's be a friend to all" or "Let's show our care for all" or "Let's try and help someone.")

## Shout It Out

(tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat")

Share, share, share God's love,  
share God's love today.  
Shout it out and tell your friends,  
God's love is here to stay!

## Ten Young Bridesmaids

(Start by holding up 10 fingers. Put one finger down as each bridesmaid runs out of oil.)

- 10 young bridesmaids with lamps burning fine.  
One ran out of oil and then there were 9.
- 9 young bridesmaids said, "The bridegroom is late."  
One ran out of oil and then there were 8.
- 8 young bridesmaids said, "Now it's past eleven."  
One ran out of oil and then there were 7.
- 7 young bridesmaids, with brightly burning wicks.  
One ran out of oil and then there were 6.
- 6 young women asked, "When will he arrive?"  
One ran out of oil and then there were 5.
- 5 young bridesmaids, standing in the room.  
"Finally he's coming! Here comes the groom."
- 5 young bridesmaids with lamps burning bright,  
went to the wedding and shared their light.

Just like the bridesmaids, we make choices, too.  
We can let our lights shine depending on what we do.

