

OLIVE + FLAME MINISTRIES · LANTERN LIBRARY

Keep Your *Lamp* Lit

*the ancient wedding and the waiting church
a betrothal season in thirty-one days*

Scripture from the Berean Standard Bible

A gift of the Lantern · oliveandflame.org

Reflections © Olive + Flame Ministries. Scripture quotations are from the Berean Standard Bible (public domain). Mishnah quotations from the Mishnah Yomit translation by Rabbi Dr. Joshua Kulp (CC BY).

The ancient wedding, honestly told

A wedding in the world of Jesus came in two acts, often a year apart. First the betrothal — *kiddushin*, also called *erusin* — which was no mere engagement but covenant itself: from that day the two were bound, and only a divorce could part them, though the bride remained in her father's house. The Mishnah opens its tractate on betrothal with the legal bones of it:

“A woman is acquired in three ways... by money, by document, or by intercourse.”

— Mishnah Kiddushin 1:1 (tr. Kulp) · read it free at oliveandflame.org

Money or document — a bride-price pledged, a covenant written. Then came the interval. The groom returned to his preparations, the bride to her readying, and the sages fixed its customary length:

“A virgin is given twelve months from the time her intended husband claimed her, in which to prepare herself for marriage.”

— Mishnah Ketubot 5:2 (tr. Kulp)

At last, the second act: *nissuin*, the home-taking. The groom came for his bride — weddings customarily arrived at night, with lamps and torches and a procession loud enough to wake the street — and led her under the canopy to the feast, seven days of joy.

A word of honesty, because this tradition attracts embellishment. Some beloved details of the popular telling — that the groom's father alone fixed the day, so the son could only say “my father knows”; that the bride kept a lamp burning in her window nightly — are not spelled out in the ancient sources. They are inferences read back from Jesus' own words. This book will not pretend otherwise, and it does not need to: the documented shape of the ancient wedding — covenant first, a price paid, a long prepared interval, a night arrival with lamps, a feast — is exactly the shape of the Gospel's hope. Jesus told the parable of the ten virgins to people who had stood in those torchlit streets. The custom illuminates the promise; the promise outranks the custom.

How to use this book

One day at a time, for a month: a short reflection, then the day's Scripture in full — read it slowly, and aloud if you can. The month walks the wedding's whole arc: the betrothal covenant, the price and the cup, the interval, the lamps and the oil, and the feast. It pairs naturally with *The Daily Psalter & Proverbs*: psalms at the day's hinges, this book beside them. Miss a day, simply carry on — the Bridegroom's delay, the parable insists, is room enough to trim a wick. Every reading can also be followed free at oliveandflame.org/plans.

PART I · THE BETROTHAL

In the world of the Bible a betrothal was not an engagement that either side could quietly drop. It was covenant — binding as marriage itself, breakable only by divorce. So when God says through Hosea "I will betroth you to Me forever," He is not being sentimental. He is signing. Righteousness, justice, loving devotion, compassion, faithfulness: five wedding gifts, named one by one, to a bride who had earned none of them. The whole season this book keeps begins here — not with our lamps, but with His vow.

HOSEA 2:14–23

¹⁴“Therefore, behold, I will allure her and lead her to the wilderness, and speak to her tenderly. ¹⁵There I will give back her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor into a gateway of hope. There she will respond as she did in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. ¹⁶In that day,” declares the LORD, “you will call Me ‘my Husband,’ and no longer call Me ‘my Master.’ ¹⁷For I will remove from her lips the names of the Baals; no longer will their names be invoked. ¹⁸On that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that crawl on the ground. And I will abolish bow and sword and weapons of war in the land, and will make them lie down in safety. ¹⁹So I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in loving devotion and compassion. ²⁰And I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD.” ²¹“On that day I will respond—” declares the LORD— “I will respond to the heavens, and they will respond to the earth. ²²And the earth will respond to the grain, to the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. ²³And I will sow her as My own in the land, and I will have compassion on ‘No Compassion.’ I will say to those called ‘Not My People,’ ‘You are My people,’ and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”

TRIM THE WICK

Which of the five wedding gifts of Hosea 2 — righteousness, justice, loving devotion, compassion, faithfulness — do you most need to receive today, and why?

The devotion of your betrothal

DAY 2

God remembers the wilderness years as a honeymoon: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness." Israel remembered the wilderness as hunger and complaint. Both memories are true; love keeps the better ledger. Whatever your following has looked like lately, this is how the Bridegroom files it when you follow at all — as bridal devotion, through land not sown.

JEREMIAH 2:1–3

¹Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ²"Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem that this is what the LORD says: 'I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. ³Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of His harvest. All who devoured her found themselves guilty; disaster came upon them,'" declares the LORD.

TRIM THE WICK

What season of your following does God remember more kindly than you do? Name it.

Ezekiel dares the most intimate picture in the prophets: God passing by, spreading the corner of His garment over an abandoned girl — the very gesture Ruth asked of Boaz — and saying, "I pledged Myself to you, entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine." Then the washing, the anointing, the jewels, the crown. Every item the bride wears is given, not earned. Splendor, He says plainly, that "I had bestowed on you." Remember this on the days your lamp feels cheap: the oil was always His gift.

EZEKIEL 16:8–14

⁸Then I passed by and saw you, and you were indeed old enough for love. So I spread My cloak over you and covered your nakedness. I pledged Myself to you, entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine, declares the Lord GOD. ⁹Then I bathed you with water, rinsed off your blood, and anointed you with oil. ¹⁰I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. ¹¹I adorned you with jewelry, and I put bracelets on your wrists and a chain around your neck. ¹²I put a ring in your nose, earrings on your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. ¹³So you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was made of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour, honey, and oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be queen. ¹⁴Your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, for it was perfect in the splendor I bestowed on you, declares the Lord GOD.

TRIM THE WICK

List three things in your life today that were given, not earned. Thank Him for each.

The rabbis read Sinai as a wedding: the covenant its ketubah, the mountain canopy its chuppah, Israel's answer — "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" — the bride's yes. A treasured possession, a kingdom of priests: these are the terms of the match. When the church later called herself the bride of Christ she was not inventing a metaphor; she was claiming an inheritance. The people of God have been spoken for since the mountain smoked.

EXODUS 19:3–8

³Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, "This is what you are to tell the house of Jacob and explain to the sons of Israel: ⁴'You have seen for yourselves what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. ⁵Now if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you will be My treasured possession out of all the nations—for the whole earth is Mine. ⁶And unto Me you shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you are to speak to the Israelites." ⁷So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸And all the people answered together, "We will do everything that the LORD has spoken." So Moses brought their words back to the LORD.

TRIM THE WICK

Israel answered the covenant aloud. What would your spoken "yes" to God sound like this morning?

The first betrothal story Scripture tells at length is a bride who has never seen the groom. A servant is sent into the far country with gifts; the question is put plainly — “Will you go with this man?” — and everything hangs on two words: “I will go.” Rebekah crosses the desert on the strength of a report. The church has always seen herself in that saddle: loving one she has not seen, traveling toward a meeting she must take on testimony. Whom having not seen, you love.

GENESIS 24:58–67

⁵⁸They called Rebekah and asked her, “Will you go with this man?” “I will go,” she replied. ⁵⁹So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham’s servant and his men. ⁶⁰And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, “Our sister, may you become the mother of thousands upon thousands. May your offspring possess the gates of their enemies.” ⁶¹Then Rebekah and her servant girls got ready, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left. ⁶²Now Isaac had just returned from Beer-lahai-roi, for he was living in the Negev. ⁶³Early in the evening, Isaac went out to the field to meditate, and looking up, he saw the camels approaching. ⁶⁴And when Rebekah looked up and saw Isaac, she got down from her camel ⁶⁵and asked the servant, “Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?” “It is my master,” the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶Then the servant told Isaac all that he had done. ⁶⁷And Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah and took Rebekah as his wife. And Isaac loved her and was comforted after his mother’s death.

TRIM THE WICK

Rebekah went on the strength of a report. What testimony are you traveling on?

Psalm 45 was composed for a king's wedding day, and the church has sung it of Christ since the beginning — the letter to the Hebrews quotes its throne-verse of the Son. Listen, daughter: forget your father's house, for the King desires your beauty. The bride is led in with joy and gladness, in garments interwoven with gold. If the season ever feels like mere waiting, this psalm is the procession rehearsal: it ends not in a waiting room but in a palace.

PSALMS 45

¹For the choirmaster. To the tune of "The Lilies." A Maskil of the sons of Korah. A love song. My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses to the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer. ²You are the most handsome of men; grace has anointed your lips, since God has blessed you forever. ³Strap your sword at your side, O mighty warrior; appear in your majesty and splendor. ⁴In your splendor ride forth in victory on behalf of truth and humility and justice; may your right hand show your awesome deeds. ⁵Your arrows pierce the hearts of the king's foes; the nations fall beneath your feet. ⁶Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever, and justice is the scepter of Your kingdom. ⁷You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you above your companions with the oil of joy. ⁸All your garments are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces of ivory the harps make you glad. ⁹The daughters of kings are among your honored women; the queen stands at your right hand, adorned with the gold of Ophir. ¹⁰Listen, O daughter! Consider and incline your ear: Forget your people and your father's house, ¹¹and the king will desire your beauty; bow to him, for he is your lord. ¹²The Daughter of Tyre will come with a gift; men of wealth will seek your favor. ¹³All glorious is the princess in her chamber; her gown is embroidered with gold. ¹⁴In colorful garments she is led to the king; her virgin companions are brought before you. ¹⁵They are led in with joy and gladness; they enter the palace of the king. ¹⁶Your sons will succeed your fathers; you will make them princes throughout the land. ¹⁷I will commemorate your name through all generations; therefore the nations will praise you forever and ever.

TRIM THE WICK

Where does this psalm's confidence collide with how you actually picture the wedding day?

The Song gives the betrothed season its soundtrack: the beloved's voice, the leaping approach over the hills, the knock — "Arise, my darling, and come away." Israel's teachers read it of God and Israel; the church of Christ and His bride; and neither reading cancels the plain one, for human love is the parable God planted in the world so we would have words for His. Learn the Song's posture: listening for a particular voice, ready to rise when it comes.

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:8–17

⁸Listen! My beloved approaches. Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. ¹⁰My beloved calls to me, "Arise, my darling. Come away with me, my beautiful one. ¹¹For now the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. ¹²The flowers have appeared in the countryside; the season of singing has come, and the cooing of turtledoves is heard in our land. ¹³The fig tree ripens its figs; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come away, my darling; come away with me, my beautiful one." ¹⁴O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the crevices of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely. ¹⁵Catch for us the foxes — the little foxes that ruin the vineyards— for our vineyards are in bloom. ¹⁶My beloved is mine and I am his; he pastures his flock among the lilies. ¹⁷Before the day breaks and shadows flee, turn, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of Bether.

TRIM THE WICK

What voice competes loudest with the Bridegroom's in your ordinary week?

PART II · THE PRICE AND THE CUP

A groom in the ancient world paid a mohar — a bride-price — and Jacob, owning nothing, paid his in years. Seven of them, and "they seemed but a few days to him because of his love for her." That line is the whole economics of betrothal: love does not haggle. When the New Testament says of Christ that "for the joy set before Him" He endured the cross, it is Jacob's arithmetic — the price counted small against the bride.

GENESIS 29:15–30

¹⁵Laban said to him, "Just because you are my relative, should you work for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be." ¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters; the older was named Leah, and the younger was named Rachel. ¹⁷Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was shapely and beautiful. ¹⁸Since Jacob loved Rachel, he answered, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹Laban replied, "Better that I give her to you than to another. Stay here with me." ²⁰So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, yet it seemed but a few days because of his love for her. ²¹Finally Jacob said to Laban, "Grant me my wife, for my time is complete, and I want to sleep with her." ²²So Laban invited all the men of that place and prepared a feast. ²³But when evening came, Laban took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and he slept with her. ²⁴And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maidservant. ²⁵When morning came, there was Leah! "What have you done to me?" Jacob said to Laban. "Wasn't it for Rachel that I served you? Why have you deceived me?" ²⁶Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older. ²⁷Finish this week's celebration, and we will give you the younger one in return for another seven years of work." ²⁸And Jacob did just that. He finished the week's celebration, and Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. ²⁹Laban also gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. ³⁰Jacob slept with Rachel as well, and indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. So he worked for Laban another seven years.

TRIM THE WICK

What has loving God actually cost you so far? Did it seem “but a few days”?

"You are not your own; you were bought at a price." Paul's words are mohar language — the bride-price has been paid, and the betrothed belongs wholly to the one who paid it. Notice what the payment purchases in the meantime: not a wedding date but a consecration. The body a temple, the life set apart. Betrothal ethics are simple: live now as one already spoken for.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12–20

¹²"Everything is permissible for me," but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me," but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³"Food for the stomach and the stomach for food," but God will destroy them both. The body is not intended for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴By His power God raised the Lord from the dead, and He will raise us also. ¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Or don't you know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in spirit. ¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a man can commit is outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.

TRIM THE WICK

You are not your own. What one habit would change if you believed it today?

In Jewish custom a betrothal was sealed with a blessing over wine — a shared cup marking covenant made. It is hard for the church to drink from the Lord's cup and not hear wedding overtones: "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." And then the vow of abstinence: He will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until the kingdom comes — like a groom who sets the cup down and departs to prepare, everything in him pointed at the day he takes it up again with her.

LUKE 22:14–23

¹⁴When the hour had come, Jesus reclined at the table with His apostles. ¹⁵And He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before My suffering. ¹⁶For I tell you that I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷After taking the cup, He gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸For I tell you that I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹And He took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body, given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁰In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you. ²¹Look! The hand of My betrayer is with Mine on the table. ²²Indeed, the Son of Man will go as it has been determined, but woe to that man who betrays Him." ²³Then they began to question among themselves which of them was going to do this.

TRIM THE WICK

At the next communion, what will you remember from this day's reading?

Paul says it outright: "I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." The church at Corinth is not pictured as married yet — betrothed, with the presentation still ahead. That is precisely the ancient wedding's shape: covenant now, consummation later, and between them a fidelity that can be seduced. Paul's fear is a serpent-whisper in the interval. The betrothed season has one great danger, and it is not the delay; it is the drift.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:1–4

¹I hope you will bear with a little of my foolishness, but you are already doing that. ²I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. For I promised you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. ³I am afraid, however, that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may be led astray from your simple and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴For if someone comes and proclaims a Jesus other than the One we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit than the One you received, or a different gospel than the one you accepted, you put up with it way too easily.

TRIM THE WICK

Name one "serpent-whisper" — a drift, not a dramatic fall — you should refuse this week.

What does the bride hold during the long interval? Paul's answer: the Holy Spirit, "the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession." His word is arrabon — earnest money, a down payment, the gift that guarantees the giver will return to complete what he began. The Spirit in you is betrothal jewelry with a promise inside it. The groom does not leave His intended empty-handed; He leaves Himself.

EPHESIANS 1:3–14

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. ⁴For He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His presence. In love ⁵He predestined us for adoption as His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will, ⁶to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the Beloved One. ⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And He has made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to bring all things in heaven and on earth together in Christ. ¹¹In Him we were also chosen as God's own, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything by the counsel of His will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, would be for the praise of His glory. ¹³And in Him, having heard and believed the word of truth—the gospel of your salvation—you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is the pledge of our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, to the praise of His glory.

TRIM THE WICK

Where have you seen the Spirit as down payment — a taste of what is promised — in your own story?

To the exiles — who felt like a wife abandoned — Isaiah announces the impossible: "Your Maker is your husband, the LORD of Hosts is His name." For a brief moment I forsook you, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you. The mountains may depart, the covenant of peace will not. Whole generations of the church have prayed this chapter in their own exiles. It is the betrothal read back to a bride who was sure the wedding was off.

ISAIAH 54:1–10

¹"Shout for joy, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth in song and cry aloud, you who have never travailed; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the LORD. ²"Enlarge the site of your tent, stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, do not hold back. Lengthen your ropes and drive your stakes in deep. ³For you will spread out to the right and left; your descendants will dispossess the nations and inhabit the desolate cities. ⁴Do not be afraid, for you will not be put to shame; do not be intimidated, for you will not be humiliated. For you will forget the shame of your youth and will remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. ⁵For your husband is your Maker—the LORD of Hosts is His name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth. ⁶For the LORD has called you back, like a wife deserted and wounded in spirit, like the rejected wife of one's youth," says your God. ⁷"For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will bring you back. ⁸In a surge of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer. ⁹"For to Me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So I have sworn that I will not be angry with you or rebuke you. ¹⁰Though the mountains may be removed and the hills may be shaken, My loving devotion will not depart from you, and My covenant of peace will not be broken," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

TRIM THE WICK

What exile in your life needs Isaiah 54 read over it?

New names are wedding gifts: no longer Forsaken and Desolate, but Hephzibah — My-Delight-Is-In-Her — and Beulah, Married. "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you." We spend the interval wondering whether our lamps are acceptable; heaven spends it rejoicing over the bride. Set this day's reading against every voice that tells you God tolerates you. The watchmen on the walls are posted precisely because the wedding is certain.

ISAIAH 62:1–12

¹For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep still, until her righteousness shines like a bright light, her salvation like a blazing torch. ²Nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. ³You will be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, a royal diadem in the palm of your God. ⁴No longer will you be called Forsaken, nor your land named Desolate; but you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be His bride. ⁵For as a young man marries a young woman, so your sons will marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so your God will rejoice over you. ⁶On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have posted watchmen; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD shall take no rest for yourselves, ⁷nor give Him any rest until He establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth. ⁸The LORD has sworn by His right hand and by His mighty arm: "Never again will I give your grain to your enemies for food, nor will foreigners drink the new wine for which you have toiled. ⁹For those who harvest grain will eat it and praise the LORD, and those who gather grapes will drink the wine in My holy courts." ¹⁰Go out, go out through the gates; prepare the way for the people! Build it up, build up the highway; clear away the stones; raise a banner for the nations! ¹¹Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the ends of the earth, "Say to Daughter Zion: See, your Savior comes! Look, His reward is with Him, and His recompense goes before Him." ¹²And they will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of The LORD; and you will be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.

TRIM THE WICK

Write your new name as heaven might speak it — not Forsaken, but what?

PART III · THE INTERVAL

After the betrothal, the groom went away — and the going was not abandonment but architecture. In my Father's house are many rooms; I go to prepare a place for you; I will come again and take you to Myself. Generations of readers have heard the Galilean wedding in these words: the son building the marriage chamber under his father's roof. What the custom illustrates, the promise guarantees: the delay is construction, and the return is personal — "I will come again." Not send. Come.

JOHN 14:1–7

¹"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe in Me as well. ²In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and welcome you into My presence, so that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵"Lord," said Thomas, "we do not know where You are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. ⁷If you had known Me, you would know My Father as well. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him."

TRIM THE WICK

What would change today if you believed the delay is construction, not absence?

Popular tellings say the groom's father alone fixed the wedding day, so that even the son could answer only "my father knows." The old sources do not spell that custom out; what we actually possess is better — Jesus' own word: "About that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." Whether or not Galilean fathers kept wedding dates secret, this Father does. The bride's calendar has one entry, undated: Be ready.

MATTHEW 24:36–44

³⁶No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark. ³⁹And they were oblivious, until the flood came and swept them all away. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. ⁴²Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day on which your Lord will come. ⁴³But understand this: If the homeowner had known in which watch of the night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴For this reason, you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect.

TRIM THE WICK

What date-setting — literal or emotional — do you need to surrender to the Father who knows?

Weddings in that world arrived at night, loud: the groom's party in the street, torches, a cry to wake the house. Paul's picture of the Lord's return keeps the same shape — a shout, a voice, a trumpet, a going out to meet him, an escort home. "And so we will always be with the Lord." He wrote it, he says, so that we would not grieve like those without hope, and then adds the only liturgical instruction the passage needs: encourage one another with these words. The midnight cry is not a threat to the bride. It is the sound she is living for.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–18

¹³Brothers, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who are without hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we also believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. ¹⁵By the word of the Lord, we declare to you that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will be the first to rise. ¹⁷After that, we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

TRIM THE WICK

Whom could you "encourage with these words" this week? Write their name.

"Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning" — dressed for service, wicks trimmed, like servants awaiting a master returning from a wedding feast. Then Luke's astonishment: when the master finds them watching, he will dress himself to serve, seat them, and wait on them. The waiting posture is not anxiety; it is readiness with the table already half-set. And the reversal at the end is pure gospel: the Bridegroom who is watched for becomes the servant who serves the watchers.

LUKE 12:35–40

³⁵Be dressed for service and keep your lamps burning. ³⁶Then you will be like servants waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks, they can open the door for him at once. ³⁷Blessed are those servants whom the master finds on watch when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve and will have them recline at the table, and he himself will come and wait on them. ³⁸Even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night and finds them alert, those servants will be blessed. ³⁹But understand this: If the homeowner had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour you do not expect."

TRIM THE WICK

What would "dressed for service, lamp burning" look like in your Tuesday?

Hidden in the alphabet of the capable wife is a line this book is named for: "Her lamp does not go out at night." The valiant woman of Proverbs 31 is not waiting idly for anything — she plants, trades, spins, gives, laughs at the days to come — and her lamp burns through the dark watches because she has tended it. Readiness, it turns out, looks like faithfulness in ordinary work. The lamp that greets the Bridegroom is the one that was already lit for the household.

PROVERBS 31:10–31

¹⁰A wife of noble character, who can find? She is far more precious than rubies. ¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he lacks nothing of value. ¹²She brings him good and not harm all the days of her life. ¹³She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. ¹⁴She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar. ¹⁵She rises while it is still night to provide food for her household and portions for her maidservants. ¹⁶She appraises a field and buys it; from her earnings she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷She girds herself with strength and shows that her arms are strong. ¹⁸She sees that her gain is good, and her lamp is not extinguished at night. ¹⁹She stretches out her hands to the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers. ²⁰She opens her arms to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. ²¹When it snows, she has no fear for her household, for they are all clothed in scarlet. ²²She makes coverings for her bed; her clothing is fine linen and purple. ²³Her husband is known at the city gate, where he sits among the elders of the land. ²⁴She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchants. ²⁵Strength and honor are her clothing, and she can laugh at the days to come. ²⁶She opens her mouth with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. ²⁷She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. ²⁸Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband praises her as well: ²⁹"Many daughters have done noble things, but you surpass them all!" ³⁰Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. ³¹Give her the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her at the gates.

TRIM THE WICK

Which ordinary work of yours is secretly lamp-tending? Do it differently tomorrow.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." The psalmist's lamp is not a floodlight; it shows the next step, no more. That is the size of light the waiting church is promised — enough for today's obedience, refilled tomorrow. Note the vow that follows: "I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes, forever, to the very end." Oil for the lamp is bought in these small denominations: today's reading, today's step, an inclined heart renewed daily to the very end.

PSALMS 119:105–112

¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. ¹⁰⁶I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments. ¹⁰⁷I am severely afflicted, O LORD; revive me through Your word. ¹⁰⁸Accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me Your judgments. ¹⁰⁹I constantly take my life in my hands, yet I do not forget Your law. ¹¹⁰The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from Your precepts. ¹¹¹Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. ¹¹²I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes, even to the very end.

TRIM THE WICK

What is the next step your lamp actually lights? Take that one, not the tenth.

Paul compresses the whole interval into one sentence: grace has appeared, training us to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives "as we await the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." Waiting, in the New Testament, is not a pause in the story but a discipline inside it — the betrothed season's whole curriculum. He gave Himself to purify for Himself a people for His own possession: bride language again, purchase language again. The waiting is the training; the training is the trousseau.

TITUS 2:11–14

¹¹For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to everyone. ¹²It instructs us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live sensible, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³as we await the blessed hope and glorious appearance of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. ¹⁴He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

TRIM THE WICK

Where is grace currently training you — and where are you skipping class?

PART IV · THE OIL AND THE LAMPS

Here is the parable the whole season stands on. Ten bridesmaids, one delayed bridegroom, a midnight cry, and the only division that finally matters: lamps with oil and lamps without. All ten slept — sleeping is not the failure. The failure was going lampless into a long delay, presuming the wait would be short and the oil transferable. But oil cannot be borrowed at midnight; readiness is the one thing no one can carry for you. "Therefore keep watch, for you do not know the day or the hour." The door that closes in this parable closes on people the bride knew by name. Keep your lamp lit.

MATTHEW 25:1–13

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 along any extra oil. ⁴But the wise ones took oil in flasks along with their lamps. ⁵When the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. ⁶At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' ⁷Then 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,' said the wise ones, 'or there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' ¹⁰But while they were on their way to buy it, the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. ¹¹Later the other virgins arrived and said, 'Lord, lord, open the door for us!' ¹²But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' ¹³Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

TRIM THE WICK

Be honest: is there oil in your vessel, or only a lamp in your hand? What is one flask to buy this week?

The lamp of God's house burned one fuel only: "pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to keep the lamps burning continually." Pressed — the light of the sanctuary was fed by crushing. An estate named Olive + Flame keeps this verse close: no oil without the press, no flame without the oil. If your season has been a crushing one, the tabernacle offers a strange comfort — that is precisely the kind of oil the perpetual light was made to burn.

EXODUS 27:20–21

²⁰And you are to command the Israelites to bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to keep the lamps burning continually. ²¹In the Tent of Meeting, outside the veil that is in front of the Testimony, Aaron and his sons are to tend the lamps before the LORD from evening until morning. This is to be a permanent statute for the Israelites for the generations to come.

TRIM THE WICK

What pressing in your life might God be turning into oil for light?

"Outside the veil of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps continually before the LORD from evening until morning." Tend — the perpetual light was not a miracle, it was a ministry. Somebody trimmed those wicks every single evening. The ner tamid still burns in every synagogue, and every church that keeps a sanctuary lamp keeps the same watch. Perpetual flames are made of daily tendings. So is a lit life: not one heroic blaze, but oil added every evening, ash cleared every morning.

LEVITICUS 24:1–4

¹Then the LORD said to Moses, ²"Command the Israelites to bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to keep the lamps burning continually. ³Outside the veil of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps continually before the LORD from evening until morning. This is to be a permanent statute for the generations to come. ⁴He shall tend the lamps on the pure gold lampstand before the LORD continually.

TRIM THE WICK

What is your "every evening" — the small tending that keeps your flame perpetual?

The call of Samuel is timed by a lamp: "The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD." It was the darkest watch — word was rare, visions few, the priesthood corrupt, the flame low. And that is the hour God speaks a boy's name twice. If the age feels like a guttering wick to you, take the timestamp seriously: the voice comes before the lamp goes out, to the one sleeping nearest the light. "Speak, for Your servant is listening" is a fine midnight prayer.

1 SAMUEL 3:1–10

¹And the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. Now in those days the word of the LORD was rare and visions were scarce. ²And at that time Eli, whose eyesight had grown so dim that he could not see, was lying in his room. ³Before the lamp of God had gone out, Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was located. ⁴Then the LORD called to Samuel, and he answered, "Here I am." ⁵He ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you have called me." "I did not call," Eli replied. "Go back and lie down." So he went and lay down. ⁶Once again the LORD called, "Samuel!" So Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you have called me." "My son, I did not call," Eli replied. "Go back and lie down." ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, because the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸Once again, for the third time, the LORD called to Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you have called me." Then Eli realized that it was the LORD who was calling the boy. ⁹"Go and lie down," he said to Samuel, "and if He calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰Then the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."

TRIM THE WICK

It is the dark watch of the age. What is God's voice saying near the low-burning lamp?

Zechariah sees this estate's whole emblem in one vision: a golden lampstand fed through golden pipes by two living olive trees — oil flowing to flame with no human hand between. The interpreting angel gives the caption: "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts." The lamp you are asked to keep lit was never meant to run on your own pressing alone. Root the lamp by the trees. And do not despise the day of small things: small flames, faithfully fed, are how the LORD finishes what His hands began.

ZECHARIAH 4

¹Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and woke me, as a man is awakened from his sleep. ²"What do you see?" he asked. "I see a solid gold lampstand," I replied, "with a bowl at the top and seven lamps on it, with seven spouts to the lamps. ³There are also two olive trees beside it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left." ⁴"What are these, my lord?" I asked the angel who was speaking with me. ⁵"Do you not know what they are?" replied the angel. "No, my lord," I answered. ⁶So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts. ⁷What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain. Then he will bring forth the capstone accompanied by shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" ⁸Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ⁹"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, and his hands will complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of Hosts has sent me to you. ¹⁰For who has despised the day of small things? But these seven eyes of the LORD, which scan the whole earth, will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel." ¹¹Then I asked the angel, "What are the two olive trees on the right and left of the lampstand?" ¹²And I questioned him further, "What are the two olive branches beside the two gold pipes from which the golden oil pours?" ¹³"Do you not know what these are?" he inquired. "No, my lord," I replied. ¹⁴So he said, "These are the two anointed ones who are standing beside the Lord of all the earth."

TRIM THE WICK

Where are you burning by your own might instead of rooting by the two trees?

The lamp is not kept lit for the lamp's sake. "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they set it on a lampstand, and it gives light to everyone in the house." The betrothed church waits publicly — her readiness is itself the city on the hill, the lamp on the stand, the good works by which the neighbors glimpse the Father. A hidden readiness is a contradiction; oil hoarded under a basket smothers the very flame it was bought for. Let it shine: the waiting itself is witness.

MATTHEW 5:14–16

¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they set it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

TRIM THE WICK

Whose house does your lamp light besides your own? Who saw it this week?

To little Philadelphia — small strength, kept word, unrenounced name — the holy One says the betrothed season's two best sentences: "I have placed before you an open door, which no one can shut," and "I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have." No rebuke in this letter, only endurance crowned. The church that keeps her lamp lit is not promised an easy watch; she is promised that the door is His to open, the hour is His to hasten, and the crown is hers to lose only by letting go. Hold fast.

REVELATION 3:7–13

⁷To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the One who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open. ⁸I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door, which no one can shut. For you have only a little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name. ⁹Look at those who belong to the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews but are liars instead. I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I love you. ¹⁰Because you have kept My command to persevere, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹I am coming soon. Hold fast to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹²The one who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never again leave it. Upon him I will write the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God (the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from My God), and My new name. ¹³He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

TRIM THE WICK

What is the "little strength" God is not despising in you right now?

PART V · THE FEAST

Every wedding in Scripture has been rehearsal for this announcement: "The marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready." She wears fine linen, bright and pure — and John glosses the gown: the linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Every hidden faithfulness of the long interval is thread in it. "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." The season of lamps ends where all lamps end at dawn: outshone, gladly, by the arrival they were lit for.

REVELATION 19:1–9

¹After this I heard a sound like the roar of a great multitude in heaven, shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God!" ²For His judgments are true and just. He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality. He has avenged the blood of His servants that was poured out by her hand." ³And a second time they called out: "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises forever and ever." ⁴And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne, saying: "Amen, Hallelujah!" ⁵Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you who serve Him, and those who fear Him, small and great alike!" ⁶And I heard a sound like the roar of a great multitude, like the rushing of many waters, and like a mighty rumbling of thunder, crying out: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns." ⁷Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. ⁸She was given clothing of fine linen, bright and pure." For the fine linen she wears is the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹Then the angel told me to write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

TRIM THE WICK

What hidden faithfulness of yours might be thread in the linen? Keep sewing one.

The end of the Bible is a wedding procession: the holy city "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband," and the vow spoken over her is the covenant formula that has run beneath every page since Sinai — "They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God." He will wipe away every tear. Behold, I make all things new. The betrothal that began with "I will betroth you to Me forever" lands here, forever kept. The bride was never waiting for a place. She was waiting to be with Him.

REVELATION 21:1–7

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. ⁴'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,' and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things have passed away." ⁵And the One seated on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then He said, "Write this down, for these words are faithful and true." ⁶And He told me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give freely from the spring of the water of life. ⁷The one who overcomes will inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he will be My son.

TRIM THE WICK

What tear are you most waiting to have wiped away? Tell Him so, plainly.

Scripture's last prayer is a bride's: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" — and the Bridegroom's last word answers it: "Yes, I am coming soon." This is where the month leaves you: not with a technique for lamp-keeping but with a longing worth the oil. Maranatha was the early church's password and toast; let it be the flame's shape in you. Keep the wick trimmed, the oil bought, the door watched, the work loved, the household lit — and with the whole waiting church, morning by morning, say Come, Lord Jesus.

REVELATION 22:12–21

¹²"Behold, I am coming soon, and My reward is with Me, to give to each one according to what he has done. ¹³I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." ¹⁴Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by its gates. ¹⁵But outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. ¹⁶"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the bright Morning Star." ¹⁷The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Let the one who hears say, "Come!" And let the one who is thirsty come, and the one who desires the water of life drink freely. ¹⁸I testify to everyone who hears the words of prophecy in this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. ¹⁹And if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and the holy city, which are described in this book. ²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus! ²¹The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

TRIM THE WICK

Write Maranatha in your own words — the prayer you will keep when this month ends.
