**TIME ALONE WITH GOD**

Ingredients:

* Half an hour, every day.
* Quiet, so you focus on yourself and on God;
* Prayer, worship, thanksgiving, as your response to God
* Word, so you can ponder His truth
* Life, people and events, so you are aware of Him in these situations

Method:

* Time – a fixed time when you are unlikely to be interrupted is best but more important is to actually start having such a time with God.
* Quiet – A simple method is to be quiet until you are aware you are in God’s presence before you start to respond to Him.
* Word – Read and be familiar with what is said. Meditate on the Word: “What does it say?” “What does it mean?” “How should I respond?” You may use the questions to help you or set them aside.
* Life – Use the time to also be aware of the things that are happening, inside you and around you. Bring these before God and speak to Him.

# Monday and Tuesday

[**MATTHEW 1:18-25**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201&version=NIV)

Remember this is your time alone with God. It is a time to tell God what is on your mind (thinking back over the past day), listen to him speak to you (reading and meditating on a bible passage), and finally, to respond to him (prayer). The questions are there to help you do this. Ignore them if they do not help. If your time is limited, I suggest that you don’t do everything in one go but spread them over the two days.

1. Take time to be quiet so you can focus on your time alone with God. Recall and briefly write down any significant things that happened or occupied you during the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [MATTHEW 1:18-25](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%201&version=NIV). Write down what you think the passage is about and what it says to you. Feel free to use the questions in “Further Thoughts” to help you think over the text.
3. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.

**Further Thoughts**

1. *“This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.”* Matthew tells us that although Jesus’ conception was unlike all other conceptions, in that it was through the power of the Holy Spirit, his birth was like all other births, from the womb of a woman. How would these details be relevant to the identity of Jesus the Messiah?
2. *“Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.”* Why were Mary’s circumstances a problem for Joseph?
3. *“ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.”* Joseph changed his mind overnight and took Mary home as his wife. He had clearly concluded previously that Mary was unfaithful and was going to divorce her, albeit quietly. He now changed his mind and took her home as his wife. What conclusions can you draw from his actions? What caused Joseph to make this abrupt u-turn? Do you think the story about the dream is believable? Do you think Joseph understood who the child is and is to be?
4. *“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”* Joseph responded to the dream in 3 ways: he immediately took Mary as wife; he decided he will not have sexual relations with her until after her pregnancy; and he named the child Jesus as instructed by the dream. How did Joseph view the dream? What was his attitude towards the instructions he was given?
5. Joseph was not instructed to refrain from initiating sexual relations with his wife but he decided to do so. As Mary was now his wife, sharing his bed, this must not have been an easy decision to fulfil. He clearly has no doubts as to Mary’s chastity. Why do you think he decided to do this? What do you think of this decision? How would you characterise Joseph?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**MATTHEW 2:1-12**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202&version=NIV)

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1. Take time to be quiet so you can focus on your time alone with God. Recall and briefly write down any significant things that happened or occupied you the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [MATTHEW 2:1-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202&version=NIV). Write down what you think the passage is about and what it says to you. Feel free to use the questions in “Further Thoughts” to help you think over the text.
3. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.

**Further Thoughts**

1. *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”* This would be part 2 of Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus the Messiah. Why would God tell the Magi, who are not Jews, about the birth of Jesus? How did God communicate with the Magi?
2. The previous account of the birth of Jesus the Messiah tells us about the supernatural and natural elements of Jesus’ birth, and the prophecy that he is to save his people from their sin. What do you think this account of God announcing the birth of Jesus to the Magi tells us? What is the meaning of the Magi’s presence at the birth of Jesus the Messiah?
3. *“When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.”* We are told that at the very least, of all Jerusalem, King Herod understood that the child the Magi referred to as “king of the Jews” is the Messiah. We know of the angels’ announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, and from Luke’s account, a couple of old but faithful persons knew about Jesus as well but except for the message from the Magi, the jewish ruling elite were not informed. Would the Magi’s inquiry serve as God’s message to the ruling elite, or would their response to the Magi show us why they were not privy to any direct messages from God?
4. What did King Herod do in response to his knowledge about the birth of the Messiah? He clearly knew how he should respond (see v8) but chose to conspire to kill the child. Do you think he felt his own kingship was threatened, or that there might be darker spiritual forces at work?
5. How did the Magi respond to the knowledge that God shared with them? How did the Magi respond to the child, despite his lowly circumstances? How would you characterise the Magi?

# Friday and Saturday

[**MATTHEW 2:13-23**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202&version=NIV)

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1. Take time to be quiet so you can focus on your time alone with God. Recall and briefly write down any significant things that happened or occupied you the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [MATTHEW 2:13-23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%202&version=NIV). Write down what you think the passage is about and what it says to you. Feel free to use the questions in “Further Thoughts” to help you think over the text.
3. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.

**Further Thoughts**

1. *When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”* In a series of dreams, this being the second, God guided Joseph to become his instrument to be the protector of his (both Joseph’s and God’s) son. What can you see in Joseph that can help you learn to be a good servant of God in the fight between good and evil?
2. *“When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.”* Herod now reveals his true nature and intentions and sought to kill the child, but God stayed one step ahead each time and helped Joseph to protect his son. Are you surprised by who Herod turned out to be? In what way could “all Jerusalem” have aided and abetted Herod in this mass murder? How could a common working class man like Joseph escape the evil intentions of the ruling elite of the land?
3. *“So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.”* The fulfilment of Scripture is a recurring theme in Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus the Messiah. But in his account we also see at play doubt, ignorance, faith, seeking, indifference and evil. The unfolding of God’s will was not a mere “snap of the fingers and it was done”. Yet at the end of the day, God’s word is fulfilled. Does this in any way help you in your own journey through doubt, ignorance, faith, seeking, indifference and evil? What can you see in Joseph’s own experience that can carry you safely through?

# Sunday

**OBEY OR OPPOSE, WORSHIP OR KILL**

*Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”*

Whether you see, as I do, the presence of evil behind the actions of Herod—he was sure that the Magi were talking about the Messiah and he plotted ahead to obtain the information about the birthplace of the Messiah to offer the Magi to lead them to believe that he is genuinely behind their cause, and he asked the Magi carefully about the exact time of the appearance of the star so that he would have a rough idea the age of the child, and he brazenly told them that he desires to worship the child—or you see a man who would stop at nothing to preserve his position, you cannot escape the picture painted for us, that Jesus was born into a hostile world.

You also cannot escape the fact that God did not assert his will with the fullness of his power. Jesus did not come in the splendour of his deity. God did not protect him with a legion of angels, as indeed he could. Jesus was born in the context of a young girl willing to trust him and entrust her future into his hands. He was protected by a man who was willing to set aside his doubts and trust the angel telling him to trust that young girl who was to become his wife. The way I see it, Jesus was cocooned in the faith and submission of an ordinary man and an ordinary woman. But their faith and obedience enabled God to assert and establish his will and his word.

And so I see in Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus the Messiah a man who expressed his faith by his obedience. But I also see, in that little act of Joseph in refraining from sexual relations with Mary, a meaningful offering, a small sacrifice, expressing his respect for the fact that his wife carries within her God’s Anointed. It was not asked for, but freely given.

While the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh had meaning as to the life of the child, to me, the fact that the Magi took it upon themselves to travel in search of the one that God had told them of, tells me of the faith that they expressed. I very much doubt that there were any instructions to follow the trail of information because then they would not have needed to ask for the location of the birthplace. To me, their seeking for the child is an expression of their faith in the God who had revealed to them, even though they were not Jews, they knew to respond in reverence and awe.

It is when you see this backdrop of faith and reverence that you can see the stain of Herod’s evil and how an event that is cause for joy and celebration was turned into a time of weeping and sorrow. And this picture remains true in all our lives. As Christ was born into a hostile world, so too our Christian lives play out in a hostile environment.

Where faith, obedience, reverence and awe exist, there also exist doubt, ignorance, indifference and evil to mar the beauty of God’s will. When we exercise faith and obey God, as Joseph did, or we might go one step further, as Joseph did, as the Magi did, to offer our sacrifice in awe and reverence of him, to go out of our way to seek him in order that we might worship him, his blessed will unfolds in our lives. But when we give in to doubt, or ignorance or indifference, or evil desires, we open our lives to forces that are destructive.

At the end of the day, God’s will and God’s word will prevail. The question is whether we will be in that will and word or whether we would have yielded ourselves to those forces that oppose him. Will our lives express our obedience or our opposition?

*“Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”*

1. Review the answers/thoughts you wrote down in the past week. Read the short sharing above. Does it add anything to your own thoughts?
2. What is God saying to you? Write down a prayer in response.