**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

[**1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-16**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%207&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 the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%207&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**

*Paul at this point in the letter answers various issues raised by the church. As we are not privy to the context of these questions it is more important to discern the principles behind Paul’s answers rather than dwell on the specifics of what he proposes, except for those points where he specifically tells us is the command of the Lord.*

1. *“Now for the matters you wrote about: ‘It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.’”* The church is basically claiming that sex is something to avoid. Why would they think that? Are there other “human needs” or “human activities” that Christians may claim to be not good for Christian spirituality?
2. “*But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.”* Paul’s response was to point to the existence of “sexual immorality” in the church. The implication was that Christians were resorting to extra-marital sexual activities, likely with prostitutes, because this notion (refrain from sex to attain higher spirituality) is preventing legitimate sexual activity between married couples. What does Paul say about this? What principle does he lay down on the matter of sexual activity between husband and wife? Is Paul enabling spousal abuse? What about the rights of a married individual? What was Paul’s intent?
3. *“I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.”* It is likely that in making the proposal the church pointed out to Paul his own example, being without a wife and therefore having no sexual activities. What does Paul say about his ability to do well without sex?
4. In the rest of the verses (vv8-16) he then deals with situations where the Christian is without a marriage partner: widowers (translated as unmarried in NIV) and widows, couples contemplating separation or divorce, and couples where one party is an unbeliever. In all of these he shares his views. What do you think are the underlying objectives or basis of his recommendations? What is the one area where he says unambiguously is a command of the Lord?
5. What do you make of Paul’s very practical approach to marriage (he does not presume on the reasons a couple enters into marriage, only that they have done so before God) and the approaches of our culture today with cohabitation, multiple marriages and divorces, marriages on the basis of romantic love, and unrestricted attitude towards sex?
6. Paul makes it clear that there is nothing wrong with sexual activity within marriage and makes clear that couples should not refrain from it except for a brief agreed-upon period for a specific purpose. However, he makes it clear that sex is not a human necessity and one can choose to have (within marriage) or do without (as a spiritual gift, implying that this is not common). Marriage however is sacred and adultery is sin. What can you learn from Paul’s approach to these practical issues that may help you think through other such issues that may be viewed as obstacles to spirituality?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%207&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 [1 CORINTHIANS 7:17-24](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%207&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. *“Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.”* “Just as God has called them” would likely mean the state a Christian was in before he became a Christian. This is a general rule flowing from his advice on Christians whose spouse did not become a believer. What is Paul’s reasoning for this? Apart from marriage, what situations did Paul apply this rule to?
2. *“Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts.”* Paul, as a Jew, was willing to discard the very thing that distinguished him as a Jew and call it nothing when compared to keeping God’s commands. It is not marriage that is important, or circumcision that is important, or any other external circumstances that are important, but the overriding desire to obey God and honour him. Christian couples must not divorce, not because marriage is something, but this is God’s command. In our relationship with non-Christian partners, God has called us to live in peace—this is what is important. Even in matters regarding our identity, our status, and even the external marks that express our covenant with God (in Malaysia, where I live, these may be points of contention with my muslim brethren), they are nothing. Only obeying God counts. This is how I read what Paul is saying here. What do you think?
3. *“Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord’s freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ’s slave.”* Clearly Paul, while establishing the rule, did not intend to be dogmatic. A slave is encouraged to accept freedom if offered. The point is, Paul tells us, your state in Christ is now your primary status. What sort of situations would you apply this rule that Paul has established?
4. *“Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.”* Do you think that this is a general guideline rather than a hard and fast rule applicable in all situations? What would “as responsible to God” imply?

# Friday and Saturday

[**1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-40**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%207&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 [1 CORINTHIANS 7:25-40](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%207&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. *“Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.”* “Virgins”, in the context of this chapter, should mean those who have never married (and therefore have no legitimate sexual experiences). What does Paul make clear about how we should take what he says here? Why do you think he takes this stance?
2. *“Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.”* What is Paul’s recommendation? What does he make clear if a person does not follow his recommendation? In doing so, Paul gives the “virgin” a choice. What do you think of his approach? How does this contrast with the prevailing views of marriage of today?
3. Paul gave reasons for his recommendation for a person choosing not to marry, beginning with the observation “because of the present crisis”. What do you think he is referring to? In doing so, Paul makes it clear that his reasons are practical: because of the times, because the world as they know it is about to crumble, and because of the urgency of God’s work. Do you think these reasons dominate today’s climate? Paul also makes clear that the person who feels the need to marry should do so: “If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married.” What do you think of such practical considerations on the matter of marriage? Do you think this is a good way to think? What are the prevailing considerations about marriage these days?
4. Paul shares the motivation behind his recommendation: “*But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this”, “I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord”.* What do you think of Paul’s view?
5. Ultimately Paul says that those considering marriage or considering to refrain from marriage are free to choose and he shared some of his thoughts for their consideration. There are those who are “compelled” to marry and there are those who “under no compulsion” choose to refrain from marriage. Both are equally free and their only obligation is their obedience to God. How do you feel about marriage? Do you think God desires you to marry and will actively seek a marriage partner for you? Do you think that God wants you to remain unmarried and that is why all your relationships did not work out? Or do you think the choice is yours to make (but he or she must belong to the Lord)? How does Paul’s view impact your own view?

# Sunday

**SEX AND MARRIAGE**

*“But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.”*

In this discussion on sex and marriage, Paul acknowledges the sex drive but says that its fulfilment must be within the confines of marriage. Marriage is the proper place for sexual activity to take place and he advises that unless one has a special gift for celibacy, Christians should marry. Sexual immorality (that is sexual activity outside the confines of marriage) is forbidden.

Clearly marriage is more than a convenient structure for sexual activity but that is not the context for the discussion in this chapter. Even so, we learn here that marriage is permanent and is dissolved only by death. Marriage must be between those who belong to the Lord. Marriage unites two persons such that their individuality is subsumed into their union, to the extent that each party should meet the needs of the other, to please the other, even to the extent where this may conflict with the affairs of the Lord. Each should be devoted to the other as part of their devotion to the Lord.

Yet Paul does not idealise marriage in the way that modern culture does, but approaches it in very practical ways. Marriage is not an end. Being free to devote oneself to the Lord and to do his work is a good reason not to marry. Being free of the concerns and restrictions of marriage is something good. Not marrying because the times are especially bad for raising a family may be wise. But seeking marriage because it is difficult to live chastely and responsibly without a marriage partner is also a good decision.

There are tradeoffs whether one chooses to marry or to remain unmarried. Paul tells us that we should exercise our will and choose the path that we will take and God will be with us as we continue to do his will.

The broader principle that we need to embrace is that the outer framework that we find ourselves in, or that we choose to embrace, does not add to, nor subtract from, our spiritual life. Whether we are in Malaysia or in Australia or Papua New Guinea does not make a difference to our spiritual life. Whether we are married or unmarried does not make a difference to our spiritual life. Whether our spouse is a Christian or not (because we were already married when one party became Christian) does not make a difference to our spiritual life. Whether we are circumcised or we are not circumcised does not make a difference to our spiritual life. What makes a difference to our spiritual life is that we keep God’s commands (or possibly, where our knowledge is limited, our intention is to obey God).

Many Christians today seek to “know God’s will” with respect to the circumstances of their life: education, job, location, church, life partner. Others are conflicted over Christian symbols: baptism (underaged and parents forbid), sprinkling or immersion, going to church, even the display of the cross as jewellery or on buildings.

The circumstances of our life shape our experiences but our obedience to God (as we learn from Scripture) shapes our spiritual life. Paul helps us to see that we can choose our circumstances (wisely!) but we must obey God. And where our choices are limited because other people are involved, Paul reminds us that God has called us to live in peace.

*“A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is—and I think that I too have the Spirit of God.”*

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.