**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

[**MARK 8:1-21**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%208&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 [MARK 8:1-21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%208&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. *“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.” His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?” “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven,” they replied.* Jesus saw the need; the disciples saw the problem. Jesus wanted them to know what they have; the disciples only knew that it was not enough. It is not that the disciples could not see or did not know. It is that they had discounted the fact that Jesus was with them. What must change in your view of your Lord and God so that you see the life around you in the way that Jesus does?
2. *The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.” Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.* It is not that Jesus could not, or never did, perform miracles. Why did he refuse the Pharisees? What do you think it means that Jesus actually returned to the other side of the lake after refusing the Pharisees? Why the big difference between the way he treated the crowd and the way he treated the Pharisees? Do you think Jesus’ warning to his disciples, “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.” is a clue as to why? Explain.
3. *“Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.” He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”* The disciples were distracted by the fact that they had forgotten to bring bread and thought Jesus was hinting about their mistake when he spoke about the yeast of the Pharisees. In responding to them, what did Jesus want them to understand?
4. The Pharisees wanted a sign before they would believe Jesus. In his exasperation over the disciples’ inability to understand, Jesus raised the issues of their inability to see, their hearts hardened, their inability to hear and their inability to remember. Do you think it is up to Jesus to do everything he can to get through to us, or it is really up to us? What do you need to do to have a better grasp of our Lord and Saviour?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**MARK 8:22-30**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%208&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 [MARK 8:22-30](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%208&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. *They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?”* Why did Jesus take the man outside the village before doing anything? The way Jesus healed this man was very different from his usual style. Why do you think it is so? What do you learn about Jesus?
2. *“I see people; they look like trees walking around.” Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, “Don’t even go into the village.”* It would appear that Jesus’ healing was not completely effective at this point but the second time the man saw everything clearly. We are not told why this was the case (the NASB translated NIV’s “then his eyes were opened and his sight was restored” as “and he looked intently and was restored” and perhaps that could be a clue) but could you hazard a guess as to why in this case the man did not initially experience complete healing? Was the problem at Jesus’ end or at the man’s end?
3. *Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”* What was the response? What do these views fall short of? What does that imply about people’s view of Jesus?
4. *“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”* What was the response? What is the difference between “John the Baptist, Elijah or one of the prophets” and “Messiah”? How did Peter (and the disciples) arrive at that conclusion?
5. In telling us the story of the man who could see clearly only after a second attempt, in the middle of stories of how the disciples failed to understand Jesus and then later was able to view Jesus as the Messiah clearly, Luke probably intended to make a point. What do you think is the key lesson for the disciples (and for us) so far?

# Friday and Saturday

[**MARK 8:31-38**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%208&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 [MARK 8:31-38](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%208&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. *“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.”* Clearly what Jesus taught about his Messiahship was different from what Peter expected and Peter decided to change Jesus’ view and attitude. In your imagination, what do you think Peter told Jesus what he should do or be doing?
2. *But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”* How did Jesus respond to Peter? Why did Jesus brand the actions of Peter as from Satan? Do you think we often override the way of Jesus, or the way of God, in favour of our own way? How can we adopt the attitude of understanding the concerns of God (and giving them pre-eminence in our hearts and minds) instead of being driven by our human concerns? What must change in us to do this?
3. It is interesting that before he rebuked Peter, Jesus looked at his disciples. What do you think he saw on their faces?
4. *Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”* Jesus marks out the parameters of being his disciples, the key qualities being leaving themselves behind (so that they are teachable), leaving their concerns behind (so that they share the concerns of God) and letting Jesus lead (to shape their mind and heart). In the way that you live out your discipleship, how much would you say you take Jesus’ criteria for discipleship seriously, and how much are you just doing what you (or the church, or Christians around you in general) think a disciple of Jesus should be doing? Do you think you are doing OK and that Jesus would be pleased?
5. Once again we see the same theme of the disciples failing to grasp Jesus’ meaning and instead focusing on their own thoughts and concerns. Are you concerned that this might also be the case for you, in that you are satisfied with living with blurred vision because you would not take being a disciple seriously? Or that Jesus’ demands for discipleship is simply too much? Or do you think that this is something that cannot be helped—only Jesus can make the difference and there is nothing we can do?

# Sunday

##### DO YOU STILL NOT UNDERSTAND?

In the story about the blind man who at first saw “people; they look like trees walking around” we are confronted with the possibility that even with the direct intervention of Jesus, restoration may not be complete. To me, the situation where “some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him” reeked of them treating the blind man as a sideshow for Jesus to perform. Instead of responding to their request, as Jesus often does, he instead led the man away to the outskirts. In such a situation, where the blind man would not really know and understand what is happening, who might not even know who Jesus was, we can understand the half-hearted response to Jesus’ question, “Do you see anything?”

In the second attempt, we were told that “he looked intently and was restored”.

In telling us this story, in the midst of telling us how Jesus struggled to help his disciples see things in the light of who he is, the Messiah, the anointed one of God, rather than business as usual with everyone on equal terms, we can see the point that is being made: Jesus is not a sideshow; his presence in our reality changes everything. We must not require him to accommodate himself into our reality; we must accommodate ourselves into his reality—we must look with different eyes, walk a different path, respond with a different heart and choose with a different mind.

As much as it boggles our mind that our Lord could, and would, actually bend reality to multiply some fish and bread to feed four thousand people, it is so much harder to imagine that someone with such immense power would allow himself to suffer, be rejected and ultimately to be killed by the very people he had established as his own. How can we understand the concerns that caused him to perform miracles that alleviated the pain and suffering of virtually nobodies, and the concerns that would stop him from doing the needful to avoid the tragic betrayal by his own?

Yet our churches continue to invest in property, buildings, lively music, entertaining preachers, displays of power in healing, prophecy, and other miracles, financial success, crowds—pandering to the yeast of the Pharisees—while avoiding the anonymity of the narrow road.

*“Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.” Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side. The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. “Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”*

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.