**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

[**PHILEMON 1:1-7**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philemon%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 the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [PHILEMON 1:1-7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philemon%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. *“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* What do you learn about Philemon from here? What do you think of Paul’s habit of blessing the person(s) he is addressing? Would such a practice diminish the blessing or would it strengthen the relationship in the context of our bond in God?
2. *“I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus.”* Paul affirms Philemon, mentioning that his love and his faith are noted by the people around him. What do you think such affirmation would do for Philemon? Do you encourage and affirm your brothers and sisters, or do you keep away from such religious language?
3. *“I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.”* Paul acknowledges Philemon as an equal partner in the Gospel and prays that working together with him in the faith may deepen his own understanding of the faith. Paul seeks to bless those he works with and seeks to help them grow in understanding (and presumably grow in faith). How can such “transfer of knowledge and perspective” happen when leaders work with younger people in the faith? Do you have this in mind in your own ministry?
4. *“Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.”* Once again Paul affirms Philemon’s love as a source of personal encouragement and joy and acknowledges that his work has been a blessing to the church. There is a warmth that emanates from Paul and he was unstinting in his encouragement of his fellow worker. Do you value your partners in the Gospel (and your brothers and sisters in Christ) and are you generous in conveying your regard for them? Do you think that Paul was “buttering up” Philemon in preparation for his subsequent request, or was he just being honest and generous?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**PHILEMON 1:8-17**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philemon%201&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 [PHILEMON 1:8-17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philemon%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. *“Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.”* This has the same effect as Paul getting down on his knees to appeal for Onesimus, a runaway slave, who has now become a Christian. What do you think of Paul choosing to do this for the sake of Philemon and for the sake of Onesimus? Paul does not shy away from tugging at Philemon’s conscience—It is as none other than Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—to make sure that Philemon makes the right decision. What do you think of Paul’s approach?
2. *“Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.”* It would seem that Paul wants to keep Onesimus with him but wants Philemon to make that decision. Why does Paul choose to take this more difficult route?
3. *“Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.”* Paul suggests the possibility that the hand of God may even be behind Onesimus’ actions, to bring about an even greater blessing for all. Clearly a slave running away is illegal and punishable by death. That is the law of the land. Paul asks Philemon to look at it in a slightly different way—temporary separation. Do you think Paul is bending reality in order to get a different result? Is this a valid approach to overcome the dilemma that Onesimus is in, or is it just being dishonest?

# Friday and Saturday

[**PHILEMON 1:18-25**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philemon%201&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 [PHILEMON 1:18-25](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philemon%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. *“If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.”* It would seem that Paul is leaving no stone unturned in his quest to save Onesimus. Why do you think this is so? Doesn’t Paul trust Philemon to do the right thing or is Paul just making sure that other matters would not cloud the issue at hand? Is Paul right to say that Philemon owes Paul his very self?
2. *“Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.”* It would seem that in writing this letter, Paul is confident that Philemon would do the right thing and even more. Why do you think Paul is so forceful in asking Philemon to do the right thing and yet would not frame it as a directive? What can you learn from Paul in his effort to help Philemon choose to do right, even though he has every right to do otherwise, even from the angle of right and wrong (as he would be obeying the law of the land)? If he was just interested in keeping Onesimus safe, Paul had many other options apart from sending Onesimus back with this letter. What was Paul seeking to achieve?
3. *“And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.”* Do you think this would be seen as an encouragement or as a threat?
4. *“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”* Paul ended his letter with greetings from his fellow workers, and a little prayer, couched as a blessing, that our Lord Jesus would be gracious towards his spirit. It would seem that the challenge to Philemon is his spirit in responding to the return of Onesimus. Nothing was said but there must be reasons why Onesimus chose to run away, risking his life to escape from Philemon’s household. Do you face any issue, especially in your relationships where you are in the right and yet things can only go forward if you choose to forgive? How can Paul’s letter to Philemon help you? How can the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ help you?

# Sunday

##### WELCOME HIM AS YOU WOULD WELCOME ME

In my view, what was most interesting about Paul’s letter to Philemon is what was not said. Granted, I am only guessing (because nothing was said) but I think that there were deep issues between Onesimus and Philemon, leading him to risk death and run away.

It is likely that these developments happened before Philemon became a Christian, because I don’t think Christian Philemon would have allowed matters to develop to the point that the slave thinks risking death by running away is the better option.

By the providence of God, Onesimus became a Christian in Rome, and met Paul there. Inevitably the story came out and Paul was determined to put things right and lay to rest a ghost in Philemon’s past.

Paul chose to do this by standing in front of Onesimus before Philemon: treat him as you would treat me; whatever he owes you, charge it to me; and if I have meant something to you, let him benefit from it.

Throughout the letter, Paul affirmed the love that exists in the heart of Philemon, and he emphasised that a redeemed Onesimus is far more valuable than just retribution.

This, of course, is what Christ did on our behalf before God. And if we have been saying in our hearts, as we read the letter, that the right thing for Philemon to do was to forgive Onesimus and take him back and then release him to service for Paul, then we understand the heart of our God and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Paul’s view, it was important for Philemon to set right this matter not just in his mind, but in his spirit. And Paul was willing to be the medium of healing for his friend, his partner and his fellow brother in the Lord.

This beautiful example of how Paul helped his brother restore his spirit over a trauma in his past should give us many possibilities as to how we can be a positive encouragement to our fellow brother or sister.

*“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”*

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.