**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

[**2 JOHN 1:1-13**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20John%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 [2 JOHN 1:1-13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20John%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**

The context of this letter is unknown but the simplest way to understand it is that it is a letter to a church that John addressed as “the lady chosen by God”, or more succinctly, “the chosen lady”. John Stott writes, “it seems almost certain that the chosen lady was one of the churches of Asia, her children its individual members, her ‘chosen sister’ the neighbouring church from which John was writing, and her sister’s ‘children’ its members.”

1. *“The elder, To the lady chosen by God and to her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love. It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.”* In this short introduction, love, and especially truth, are heavily emphasised. Having read through the whole letter, can you guess why this emphasis? Is truth (in terms of your faith and conduct) important to you in your own Christian life and walk?
2. *“And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.”* John reiterates this foundational teaching of the church, that we are to love one another. This is to tell his readers that what he is going to say next does not cancel or set aside this command. Do you similarly accept this command to love one another as fundamental and foundational and not in opposition to truth? In other words, in Christian faith and practice, should truth and love stand side-by-side, or love is more important than truth, or truth is more important than love?
3. *“I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.”* Now comes the main point that John wants to make. What do you think is the problem? Are these deceivers presenting themselves as Christians or as “anti-Christians”? What is John’s instruction about them?
4. *“Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.”* What is the measure by which we identify true believers and those who are deceivers? What are the deceivers teaching? What is John’s instruction about those who are deceivers?
5. What do you think is the intent of “do not take them into your house or welcome them”? How does it exist alongside “love one another”?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**3 JOHN 1:1-8**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=3%20John%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 [3 JOHN 1:1-8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=3%20John%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. *“The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”* John tells his friend that he prays for his physical health, his circumstances, as well as his spiritual health, and finds joy in his good testimony. What about you? What is your concern and prayer for your church mates?
2. *“Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God.”* Gaius has been hospitable, even extending his help to Christians who were strangers. In modern communities we are warned to treat strangers with suspicion. How can we exercise Christian love to those in need in the midst of a society that often takes advantage of people’s kindness to rob and steal? What about those who beg on the streets, and the many appeals for donations for a myriad of needs? Or should we limit our love only to church members?
3. *“It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.”* In this case, John was speaking of Christians who were serving the Church as missionaries. In what ways do you support those who work for the Kingdom of God?

# Friday and Saturday

[**3 JOHN 1:9-15**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=3%20John%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 [3 JOHN 1:9-15](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=3%20John%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. *“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.”* It would seem that there was an elder in Gaius’ church who refused to support the missionaries that John sent and even stopped others from doing so. What was his problem? Do you think what he was doing was merely the prerogative of a church elder or he was doing something wrong? Would this fall under what John wrote in 2 John: “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.”?
2. *“Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.”* How does John suggest Gaius assess the decisions and actions of another leader?
3. *“Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.”* Demetrius (probably someone who is a visitor to the church requiring hospitality or even the one bearing John’s letter) is well spoken of by people, by John and even by the truth. What do you think is meant by “well spoken of by the truth”? What do you think of John, in commending Demetrius, highlighted the fact that Demetrius has a good reputation among Christians, among the leaders and when tested against Scripture?
4. While 2 John warns of deceivers who must not be welcomed because they may lead the congregation into error, 3 John warns of Christian leaders who are inhospitable, even towards people who were well recommended. At some point the church would fall into doing what is evil despite the fact that this stems from the actions of a church leader. Do you think it is important that we judge not just theological correctness but also the expression in life of such theology? Are we capable of such judgement, or are we incapable of judging and we depend on others (like leaders), or perhaps we should not judge at all?

# Sunday

##### THE BATTLE FOR TRUTH

*“It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.”*

One of the most fundamental commands that must shape a church is the command to love one another. If a church does not have the reputation of love, the church cannot be said to be an ambassador for Christ. It must give us all pause to see that in his message to the church in Ephesus in The Revelation, Jesus even threatened to remove their lampstand because they had forsaken the love they had at first even though they excelled in keeping themselves pure.

This command however renders churches vulnerable to those who come under false pretences and those who are in error. As time went on, churches grew in number and spread over many countries. The direct influence of the 12 apostles waned and more and more the letters that they have written became the source of teaching, leading to the point when they were gathered together as the New Testament.

It was important for the church to recognise error from truth and to distance themselves. The nature of the Gospel, the Lordship of Christ, and, in these 2 letters we are looking at, the character of the truth we build our lives upon and not merely give intellectual assent to, are the broad guidelines that the New Testament writers taught in the battle for truth.

John expressed joy in seeing some of the church members “walking in the truth”. He noted that Demetrius was “well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.” This is about the fruit of his life and not just the fruit of his words.

On the other hand, Diotrephes wanted to control everything and did so by keeping out other teachers. He may have had good motives, although John noted that as a person he “loves to be first”, but as we all know from experience, when there is no one around to tell you that you are wrong, the easiest path to go down is the path to evil.

John did not mince his words and characterised both the deceivers and those who abuse their position as wicked and evil, and we need to be mindful that John did not treat them lightly.

It is interesting that in both the letters, John ended by saying that he prefers to talk “face to face”. This may just be an aspect of John’s character but I think that ultimately we best recognise truth from error when we are able to see not just their written word but also their whole person that should embody truth. Truth is not just propositions (words, ideas, concepts) but ultimately, truth is the person, as Jesus taught when he told us, “I am the way and the truth and the life.”

*“I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.”*

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.