**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 15:21-28**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2015&version=NIV)**,** [**MARK 7:24-30**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%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 [MATTHEW 15:21-28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2015&version=NIV), [MARK 7:24-30](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%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**

These two passages describe the same incident and provide different details that we should take note of to get a fuller picture of what happened.

1. *“Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret.”* Very likely this arose from the aborted attempt earlier to get some rest for himself and his disciples (see Mark 6:30-34). What does this tell you about Jesus’ focus at this point?
2. *“In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.”* What are the significant details (and what are their significance) of this woman as told in the two passages?
3. What did the woman do when Jesus did not respond? How did the disciples view the woman? What were the reasons for Jesus’ hesitation to help the woman?
4. Both the passages made it prominently clear that the woman was a Gentile. Why would a Gentile woman overcome social barriers, gender barriers, even to the extent of being a gate-crasher, to seek healing for her daughter from a Jewish rabbi? How was it that she called him “Lord, Son of David” even though she was a Gentile? What does it tell you about her?
5. What do you think the woman meant by her response, that Jesus praised and described as reflected great faith?
6. What can you learn from the woman about prayer and what can you learn from Jesus as to what moves him to answer prayer?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**LUKE 4:14-30**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%204&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 [LUKE 4:14-30](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%204&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. *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”* In this particular incident, we read of Jesus, riding on the crest of a wave of popularity, returning home to Nazareth where he had the complete attention of everyone. What did Jesus teach them?
2. *All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.* How did the people from his village respond to him? Do you think the recognition that Jesus was Joseph’s son was with admiration (local boy made it big) or with doubt as to his claim (local boy with dubious background claiming to be fulfilment of Scripture)?
3. *“Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”* Here is the connection to the previous passage—the widow in Zarephath was a Syrophoenician as well and Naaman was Syrian. You can read the two accounts of Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 17:7-24 and 2 Kings 5. What was the point that Jesus was making about the Jews and about the widow and Naaman (both of whom were Gentiles)? What do you learn about God?
4. Do you think Jesus coming to the Syrophoenician woman’s village was a happy accident or a deliberate action? Explain your thinking.

# Friday and Saturday

[**MARK 6:1-6**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%206&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 6:1-6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%206&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. *“Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.”* This account in Mark (and also Matthew 13) is likely the same incident as the Luke account (some think that they are two separate incidents), but with a very different focus—the unbelief of the folks in Jesus’ hometown. While they were initially impressed, what caused them to think otherwise?
2. *Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.”* Note that Jesus’ words were focused on the issue of honour. Why is this frequently the case, that those who are most familiar with a person would often fail to express the honour that is due? Do you think that over time, we Christians can be so familiar with Jesus and God that we fail to give him due honour?
3. *“He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.”* It is an irony that the people who were accorded the privilege of having advance access to him ultimately sought to kill him, while the Syrophoenician woman, a Gentile who was regarded by Jews as “dogs”, demonstrated faith and treated Jesus with honour and deference. Is there a lesson for Christians here?

# Sunday

##### FAITH AND HONOUR

*“Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”*

I had problems with Jesus’ encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman for a long time. Not just because of his hesitation to help the woman, not even his reference to dogs with respect to the Gentiles, but because I could not see what was so remarkable about the woman’s faith. To me she showed remarkable love for her daughter and was willing to do anything to save her but Jesus commended her for her faith.

Jesus was there to take a break with his disciples when the woman barged in, crying out loudly for his help. He did not respond but neither did he send her away nor chastised her but she took his silence for rejection and started pestering his disciples and of course that was a mistake. But when his disciples asked him to send her away, Jesus responded enigmatically, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel”, a reference that they might remember as part of his instructions when he sent them on a preaching mission (Matthew 10): “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” We should understand too that it is only within the Jewish Scriptures that the identity and mission of Jesus can be ascertained and authenticated; the uttermost parts of the world comes later.

The woman took the opportunity to enter directly into his presence and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

Then Jesus said something so out of character that I’m sure it was for the ears of his disciples, as the Jews commonly call the Gentiles “dogs”. “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

“Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

What caught my attention this time was the realisation that she was saying to Jesus, “I may be a dog, but you are still my master.” I may be a Gentile but you are Lord of all and not just the Jews.

The passages describing Jesus’ encounter with the people in his village sharpened the contrast that had amazed Jesus. They were privileged as Jews, and even more so because they likely knew him when he was young, and knew his family. Yet their very closeness to him were the obstacles to their acknowledgement of God’s hand on him and to accord him the honour that is his due. Jesus’ reference to the widow of Zarephath and Naaman underlined the fact that this was often the case in the history of Israel.

God chose to tear down the curtain that separates us from his holy presence. Jesus told his disciples (and us), “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” Our weekly ritual of remembrance that he requested of us is a simple partaking of bread and wine. Nothing too demanding or fancy. Prayer is as simple as addressing “Our Father who is in heaven.” All the elaborate rituals and sacrifices in Jewish Law have been rendered redundant by the sacrifice of God’s son.

Yet often we too need to hear the question God asked through the prophet Malachi, “‘A son honors his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?’ says the Lord Almighty.”

It was the Gentile woman who knew who he was and what he could do for her. Right from the start she addressed him as “Lord, Son of David.” And she told him that it was fine to be just a dog in his household but you are my master. Your crumbs are all I want.

Faith drew her to him. But I think the greatness of her faith lies in the honour she accords to him.

*“Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.”*

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.