**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

[**EPHESIANS 6:1-3**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%206&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 [EPHESIANS 6:1-3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%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. *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”* The context is the Christian family, as in the previous verses Paul was speaking of husbands and wives. Yet Paul gave a basis that is universal—this is right. In other words he is not saying that as Christians we should do this, but rather this is the right thing to do at all times. Do you think that this command is also relevant where the child is a Christian but the parents are not? How would you justify your point of view? Do you think that the command is directed towards children below the age of consent (18 years) or that it stands no matter how old you are?
2. *“Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”* Paul now links the idea of obedience to the idea of honouring and brings in the fifth command. In other words, children are to obey because this honours their parents. Would you say that honouring is the more important goal than obeying, especially when the children are adults?
3. *“ … which is the first commandment with a promise”* Paul makes the observation that this is the first command in the 10 commandments where God gave a promise regarding the outcome of such attitude and behaviour in the family. Would you say that this is a universal truth (families where children honour their parents succeed better) or this is only relevant to the Jews (and by extension, Christians) in that God will ensure that such families succeed?
4. When you have been inculcated with the value of respecting and honouring your parents, and by extension, your elders, as a universal notion of what is right, how would that shape your character and mind?
5. In modern times, the Western ideal of individualism, personal ambition, pushing the limits of behaviour, and the value of breaking free from what constrains you (including notions of right and wrong) in order to achieve more than what you have been taught is now the dominant value in many societies. The message is that this is what will bring success. This is something good. Do you think they are right and God is wrong, or God is right and they are wrong, or there should be some way for the two values to co-exist?
6. Do you think the value of honouring parents (and elders and those in authority) stifles progress? Do you think the value of breaking free from the restraints of the older generation ignores the wisdom that ultimately comes from God? Do you think it is the right of every individual (and ultimately, generation) to decide and set their own values and goals? Do you think it is important to raise our children in the fear of God and the wisdom it imparts?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**EXODUS 20:1-12**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%2020&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 [EXODUS 20:1-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%2020&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 am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”* God preferred to identify himself as the one who rescued Israel, rather than the God of all Creation. Should you honour your parents because they brought you into existence, or because they raised you? Should you have any obligation to them?
2. *“You shall have no other gods before me.”* The key word here is “before”, meaning “in front of”. Is it wrong to listen to other people and follow their advice even though they contradict your parents? How can you deal with situations where your parents are clearly wrong or they contradict your choices (e.g. education, career)? Is it wrong to put the welfare of others (or your own) over and above the welfare of your parents?
3. *“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.”* Is it wrong to behave in such ways that you are the cause of their jealousy or unhappiness or even sorrow? Is it wrong to make their love for you a source of pain and grief for them?
4. *“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”* Is it wrong to misrepresent your parents, or to tarnish their reputation or even to misuse their reputation and achievements without their knowledge, for your own cause?
5. *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God.”* Is it wrong to be so busy and occupied with your own life that you neglect to spend time with your parents in ways that will strengthen the bonds between you? Is it enough that you support them financially? Is it wrong to neglect family relationships, including with your siblings?
6. *“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”* Why would honouring parents be, as in Paul’s eyes, right, and how would it release the promise of life as God intends?

# Friday and Saturday

[**EPHESIANS 6:4**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%206&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 [EPHESIANS 6:4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%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. *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”* The overarching context is Paul’s call for the Christian community to “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21). There is no such command in the 10 commandments. Why do you think Paul added this in the context of the Christian family? How does this help us understand the implications of “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”?
2. *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”* We should read “fathers” to mean “parents”. What does it mean to (not) exasperate your children (see the translation in ESV and the interpretation in The Message)? In the context of the injunction for children to obey their parents, what would it mean that parents are called to not provoke their children? Does it mean that Christian children are free to disobey parents who are selfish and unreasonable in their demands (exasperate or provoke or frustrate)?
3. *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”* Teach and train, rather than impose and demand. Moreover, when children are already exasperated, provoked and frustrated, parents will find it hard to teach and train. Is the onus on children to honour their parents or on parents to provide the environment and training so that children will learn to honour them?
4. How can we develop the skill of training and instructing without exasperating, provoking and frustrating our children? Should the task of bringing up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord be left for individual parents to figure out and decide “on-the-job” or should the church be a source of teaching, training, support and encouragement?

# Sunday

**BRING CHILDREN UP IN THE TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION OF THE LORD**

*“Fathers, don’t frustrate your children with no-win scenarios. Take them by the hand and lead them in the way of the Master.” (The Message)*

God takes an interest in the welfare of the child and there are many passages in the bible, especially in Proverbs, that lend the wisdom of God to the matter of raising children. What is most interesting, however, is the fifth commandment, because it tells us that well-brought-up children are a vital key in God’s plan to establish his moral values in his people.

Western culture, built on the strong moral codes that the Christian Church taught and imposed, have since been rebelling, on the premise that these teachings were imposed and often strictly applied and with disregard for grace and love towards the individual. Instead the West has been espousing the value of individualism, personal ambition, pushing the limits of behaviour, and the value of breaking free from what constrains you (including notions of right and wrong). No one, and no institution, should impose because such institutions and authority figures are flawed, as exposed by history. Every individual can and should choose their own values, beliefs and paths.

Where the church has sinned, the church should repent, but instead, we too buy into this culture and the values it espouses.

Paul clearly states that parents are to bring their children up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Yet the church often goes with the flow of society in making the family a private matter and generally avoids any effort to be involved with families in the matter of raising and training children to grow in the Lord as it is seen as the private domain of parents. And we no longer teach moral truths with the force of God, even as we water down salvation to avoid talking about our sin, and we are apologetic about God’s wrath and about heaven and hell.

Families do not spend time around the Word; saying grace is often treated as a joke; praying when you wake, and praying when you sleep is rarely practised; learning to be aware (and be respectful) of the presence of God when we worship is something even the adults need; helping the poor and needy and caring about their plight is at best occasional. There is much to be done to raise our children “in the training and instruction of the Lord”.

And so the ills of society are very often in the church and in the Christian families as well. If children are not taught to honour those who have raised them, how would they ever learn to honour God, who has rescued them at such personal cost?

I believe the family ministry should be a vital ministry in every church, not to tell parents how to raise their children, because we are all flawed people, but to be a resource and support, as well as a voice to counter the powerful voice of the media, and to help our families hear the voice of God more clearly and inculcate the values of God in their children so that they honour their parents and unlock the promise of “life abundantly; life in thy ways.”

*“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”*

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.