**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 4:1-6**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%204&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 during the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [EPHESIANS 4:1-6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%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. *“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”* Do you think Paul is asking the Ephesians to live certain types of life that is worthy of their calling (for example the life of a missionary) or is he saying that the lives they live should be lived in such ways that are worthy of their calling? How is being a prisoner worthy of his calling? What makes that life worthy?
2. *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”* Coming immediately after the previous sentence, we can assume that being humble, gentle, patient, helping and affirming each other in love, are important elements of the worthiness of the life lived. These are what we would recognise as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Would you agree with Paul that these qualities mark out lives that are worthy of Jesus’ sacrifice and call? In contrast, what lives (or characteristics) are usually held in high regard in our society these days? How do you feel about what Paul says and what the world thinks? Is there a conflict? What would be your priority?
3. *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”* It would seem that in Paul’s mind, when it comes to the issue of unity we need to go one step beyond having and exercising the fruit of the Holy Spirit; we must make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through keeping the peace. Why is unity so vital that Paul makes special mention of it? Do you think this means “agree to disagree”, “turn blind eyes”, “don’t rock boats”, “do everything yourself”, “don’t raise issues that may ruffle feathers”, “have carpets that cover a multitude of wrongs”, or “enforce discipline so that everyone is on the same page and there are no disagreements”? What do you think Paul has in mind in telling everyone to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit”? What is at the heart of the unity of the Spirit that Paul is talking about?
4. How does being the person who is “living a life worthy of the calling you have received” impact our ability to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit”?
5. In that grand description of God in vv4-6, Paul links certain aspects with the individual members of the Trinity:
* Spirit – body, calling, hope
* Jesus – Lord, faith, baptism
* God – Father of all, over all, through all, in all

If you have time, spend some time thinking through this breakdown and how it impacts your relationship with God.

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**EPHESIANS 4:7-13**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%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 [EPHESIANS 4:7-13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%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. *“But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.” (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)”* The quote is from Psalm 68:18 with 1 major change: instead of the victorious king receiving gifts from the conquered, here Paul describes the Lord as giving gifts. From this and the other points Paul made here, how is Paul describing the Lord to us?
2. *“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* Paul tells us that the gifts that a church enjoys are given by Christ. What are these gifts intended for? The people who hold these gifts (the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers) are in positions of influence and may cause disunity in the church. What does Paul say is their role and objective? From the way Paul phrased the point he is making, these people with these gifts serve Christ by serving the body (because they are Christ’s gifts to the body) and everyone in the body. What do you think about what Paul is saying here? How would this perspective impact you, either as one of those “gifts”, or as a member of the body, or both?
3. *“ … so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* Paul tells us that the path to maturity and fullness in Christ passes through unity in the faith and the knowledge of Christ. In other words, true maturity and fullness of Christ must be shaped by the qualities that draw us together to be united with the others in the body, qualities that we find in Jesus Christ. What would some of these qualities be?
4. Jesus is a very different Lord and King from those we are used to. In his victory he chose to give rather than receive. His exaltation is all the greater because he had chosen to humble himself and become man. And his desire to reunite us with God led him to sacrifice himself without sacrificing the true nature of God and his holiness. Take some time to ponder on the nature of our Lord and what it means to live a life worthy of him.

# Friday and Saturday

[**EPHESIANS 4:14-16**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%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 [EPHESIANS 4:14-16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%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. *“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.”* Paul views the mature Christian as one who is not readily influenced by circumstances (waves) and by people (wind) but shaped by our faith, our relationship with Christ and our transformation into his likeness (see v13). Does this give you a clear path, knowing what you must do to become mature in the Lord?
2. *“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”* “Speaking the truth” is better understood to be “practising truth”, meaning speaking and dealing truly because the Greek word suggests more than just speech. Paul is suggesting that we help each other grow to maturity by dealing with one another in truth and love. Truth alone can be destructive while love alone compromises; truth in love is food to grow the soul. Think over the relationships in church. Do people avoid truth out of love, or speak truth without love? How can “truth in love” be expressed instead, in speech and action? How can the fact that our “head” is Christ help us to “truth in love”?
3. *“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”* The idea here is that every part works well and works well with each other, and works well in love because everybody recognises Christ as the head and everybody supports each other with “truth in love”. The core of our unity is that we serve and worship one Spirit, one Lord, and one God. Is such a church community possible? What must be in place before it can grow in this way?
4. While Paul calls on the Ephesians to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received” he went on to speak of the Church and how the Church ought to function and the whole idea is that when the Church functions well then we will all grow to be mature, and this maturity is “a life worthy of the calling you have received”. Yet for many people, church is a stumbling block to their Christian life. Do you think it is OK to choose to grow and mature apart from the church? Do you think it is possible to grow and mature apart from the church?

# Sunday

**CHRISTIAN GROWTH AND THE CHURCH**

*“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”*

It is very interesting to find that in the context of calling on the Ephesians to live lives worthy of their calling, Paul talked at length about the church. He specially highlighted the unity of the church, calling on them to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

The unity reflects the unity of the Triune God and there is the underlying implication that when unity is lacking the body will not function well, and when the body is not functioning well the growth of individual lives may be impeded.

Paul tells us that right from the outset, Christ gave gifts to the church and specifically he gave the church people who have the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip members of the body, that they may grow to become mature Christians, worthy of Christ.

In other words, one of the core functions of the church is to build up members to become mature Christians, whose lives are worthy of their calling. The reverse must also be true, that members need to be a part of the community (because the community possesses the special gifts that Christ gives) to grow in maturity.

When the unity of the Spirit is broken, the church’s ability to nurture Christians to maturity is impaired. When truth is sidelined for love, and when love is sidelined for truth, the environment in which members will grow to become is polluted and diluted because Christ is no longer the head. The church instead produces stunted Christians, stuck in perpetual infancy, never able to find the anchor in the God who is Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Such Christians, who are “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming” bring no glory to Christ.

It is important for us to understand that when Paul tells us “speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become” he is not talking about teaching and sermons (although surely the teaching of the Word is vital); rather, he speaks of truth in action—truth lived, truth that sharpens each other, truth that cleanses and purifies—all done in the spirit of love, gentleness, patience, kindness and self-control. Then, Paul tells us, “we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.” The church desperately needs “truth in love” rather than clever sermons and sterile relationships.

How important it is that we, as members of the body of Christ, pay heed to the wisdom of God and “be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” so that the Church may indeed be “the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.”

*“From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*

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.