**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 4:17-24**](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 4:17-24](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. *“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.”* Note that we are not talking about careers or locations but the thinking that shapes the life. The Gentiles (or in our context, those who do not trust nor follow Christ) either have no God in their worldview, or have god who is unlike the God of the Universe as revealed in Scripture. How would that translate into life choices?
2. *“They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.”* One possible life choice that Paul suggests is hedonism, or more broadly, greed—a life given over to pleasure, accumulating sensations, experiences and possessions with no other reference except the self, because there is no larger meaning or purpose, nothing that lasts, nothing that remains. When we choose to live lives that do not take into account the reality of the living God, we live as the Gentiles do. Do you think your life choices have been shaped by the reality of God in your life?
3. *“That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”* Paul tells us that being a Christian is not merely intellectually agreeing that Jesus is God and he sacrificed himself as a ransom for our sin; it is to embrace the life that he offers—one that puts God at the centre—made possible by his death and resurrection and in doing so abandon the old that was built without God. Is this the Gospel you received? Is this the Gospel you entered into a covenant with God over? Is this the Gospel that is at work in your life today? Note the insistence of Paul: there is no other Gospel.

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**EPHESIANS 4:25-28**](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 4:25-28](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. *“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”* “Therefore” simply means that as we understand that being a Christian is embracing the life of Christ, we must … build our relationships with one another on truth (and love) because we belong to the body of Christ. As Paul had already linked truth and love previously, we must not read “speak truthfully” without understanding him to mean “speak truthfully in love”. Would this be something very difficult to be practised in church? Why do you say so?
2. *“‘In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”* Christians fail to do this very often, carrying the scars of hurts long into the future, deciding to stop volunteering, or stop caring, or stop praying, or even stop speaking (to certain members) because we do not pay heed to Paul’s warning about giving the devil a foothold in our hearts. Paul does not tell us how to deal with our anger that leads us to sin. How do you think we can do this? Is this something that you need to consider honestly before the Lord?
3. *“ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.”* The underlying principle here is that everyone in the body should consider how they can share with those in need and when they think they have nothing, then they should work to have something. In the body everyone should be in a position to receive and to give because “we are all members of one body”. Are you too proud to receive, or too lazy to give, or doing well in this respect, in the body of Christ?

# Friday and Saturday

[**EPHESIANS 4:29-32**](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 4:29-32](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. *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”* We mustn’t read this and think that Paul meant “nothing else but …” because people will feel that you need to lighten up or you would much prefer to keep quiet about everything. This is about the principle that we speak truth in love and that means that we speak out of love for the person, wishing to build the person up rather than tear down. We choose our words carefully. Do you think this is something very difficult to do? Why so? How can bringing Christ into the picture, as the head of the body, help?
2. *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”* The simplest way to understand grieving the Holy Spirit of God would be to link it with the instruction in the next sentence. In the light of all that has been said about speaking the truth in love, perhaps this is more about hearing the truth spoken in love to us: how can we get rid of such festering bitterness and anger in us when we hear truth, even truth spoken in love? And how can we stop ourselves from responding in slander, malice and even outright fights? How can we help others who are in the grip of the devil because they have given him a foothold? How can bringing the Holy Spirit of God—the one who baptised us all into the body—into the picture, help?
3. *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”* Not everyone is in the right frame and in the right relationship with Christ; not everyone is mature; and not everyone is ready to listen to truth, even delivered in love. At all times, instead of being angry or hurt or self-righteous or even condescending, Paul reminds us that we are always in need of Christ’s forgiveness, because he is our perfect head of the body; and if so, we should find it easy to forgive and be kind and compassionate to one another. Do you struggle to forgive, wanting to extract your pound of flesh if possible? Do you want to hurt others, who have hurt you? How can bringing in God who forgave you by sacrificing his Son for you, help?

# Sunday

**TRUTH IN LOVE**

*“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Paul tells us that the Lord intends the church to nurture Christians to maturity and the fullness of Christ. He has given us resources to equip us “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 now calls us to “truth in love” as we “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Christ commands all who enter to love one another. God, as the focus of our worship, draws us into the truth of his being: holiness, righteousness, compassion and mercy. The Holy Spirit dwells in each of us to lead and guide us through his Word and to empower us as we embrace this new life. What we need to do is to practise truth in love with one another.

Truth and love is the power of God to transform us to maturity in Christ.

The challenges to this community are the world and its view of life, self-righteousness and judgement, bitterness, anger and malice, laziness, the cunning and deceit of the agents of the devil, the power of greed and sensuality, and the devil himself. What these seek to do is destroy the unity of the Spirit, grieve the Holy Spirit, corrupt the soul and give the devil footholds into both the Christian as well as the church.

Truth keeps us from the deception of the world and love heals us from the wounds that open up as we obey the truth, putting off our old self and putting on the new, so we do not give the devil a foothold. The healing medication available to us is God’s kindness, compassion and forgiveness, that we can receive and apply to one another.

The theory sounds good but looking at it all, growing to maturity would seem an impossible mission practically. Churches are full of problems and unity rarely goes beyond the superficial. So many things can go wrong in so many places and we are all sin-ridden and imperfect—even leaders may fail. But we need to trust the process and obey our Lord: Keep the unity of the Spirit and maintain truth and love with one another.

Jesus says, with all confidence, *“With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10:27)*

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.