**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

[**I THESSALONIANS 1:1-3**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%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 during the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [I THESSALONIANS 1:1-3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%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. *“Paul, Silas and Timothy.”* Paul frequently mentions his co-workers when he writes to the churches. Do you see and recognise your place in the work of the church as a part of a team and do you actively sustain that team spirit, or is your team merely a group of different people who happen to be placed alongside you?
2. *“To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Paul sees the church in the context of God and Christ, rather than as a body that exists on its own, and rather than as a body that belongs to the members. The church belongs to God and Christ and exists for them. Would this way of looking at the church you belong to make a difference for you?
3. “*Grace and peace to you.”* In his greeting, he wishes them grace and peace. What would it mean that a church receives, and is blessed with, God’s grace and peace?
4. *“We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers.”* For Paul, the church is family, always in mind and prayer. He sees them as a body but also remembers them as individuals; they are all precious to him. Would you say this is true of you as well?
5. *“We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Clearly Paul wants to highlight faith, hope and love and he applies these virtues to their work and perseverance and brings all of these into the reality of God and Christ. Take some time to think about these: work and perseverance, faith, hope and love, God and Christ, and how they make up the underpinnings of a vibrant and healthy church. Do you see these as the hallmarks of your church as well?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**I THESSALONIANS 1:4-7**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%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 [I THESSALONIANS 1:4-7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%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. *“For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.”* It would seem that when the Gospel came to the Thessalonians, there were many signs of God’s presence and participation, perhaps even physical displays of power such as healing and casting out of demons, but certainly spiritual displays of the presence of the Holy Spirit, with people responding in deep conviction and repentance. Paul took these as signs of God’s affirmation of their salvation. Do you think such external signs are important assurances that indeed those who responded have entered into the kingdom? Do you think the absence of such signs also mark the absence of God? Explain.
2. *“You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.”* Paul’s Gospel was not merely preached but lived as well and as a result, when the Thessalonians accepted the Gospel, they also accepted the expression of the Gospel as exemplified by Paul and his co-workers. What was the key mark of the Gospel that the Thessalonians embraced? Why does Paul say that the joy was given by the Holy Spirit—did they welcome the message with joy, or they welcomed the message and were given joy, or they were given joy and as a result welcomed the message, or do you have another way of understanding what Paul said?
3. *“And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.”* Paul says that the experience of the Thessalonians is a model to all the believers in the area. Do you think he was referring to how they became Christians (not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction) or how they expressed their faith (You became imitators of us and of the Lord) or both? How would you summarise the Christian experience that Paul holds up here?
4. Would you say that your own Christian experience more or less is the same, in that your experience falls within the model that Paul holds up as exemplary? Explain.

# Friday and Saturday

[**I THESSALONIANS 1:8-10**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%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 [I THESSALONIANS 1:8-10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%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 Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us.”* Beyond becoming a model for believers, the experience of the Thessalonians also became a testimony to non-Christians; a living testament to the power of the Gospel. Paul says that they did not need to say anything—the non-Christians were all talking about it. Do you think this kind of living witness is possible these days?
2. *“They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”* Not only were they talking about what happened, they were also talking about the reason for what happened: the message of the Gospel of Jesus. So as the Thessalonians went about their lives they were able to explain their faith to those who wanted to know and they in turn could tell others. Do you think this is possible these days or is our evangelism so dilute or our Gospel so complicated that those who become Christians cannot explain their faith and their experience to others?
3. What about you: is your Christian experience something that others would be interested in? Is it worth sharing? If asked, can you explain your experience and your faith? Can you share who Jesus is and the role he plays in your life these days?

# Sunday

**THE TRANSFORMING GOSPEL**

*“For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.”*

A gospel that only makes a difference after death will have little impact in today’s sceptical world. Anyone can make claims that cannot be substantiated, and many do.

Paul’s Gospel however came with not just words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. What was the difference? May I venture to suggest that the answer is in the next sentence: “You know how we lived among you for your sake.”

The Thessalonians were drawn to the Gospel because of what they could see in the lives of Paul and his co-workers. And when they embraced Paul’s Gospel, they imitated their example, and the Lord, and in turn were able to share the Gospel just as effectively.

The modern church’s obsession with numbers as a measure of success has resulted in watering down the Gospel and reducing it to a few sentences to be intellectually accepted. The manifestation of the Gospel in lives transformed, joy in all circumstances, love that transcends barriers, has been replaced by slick advertising, massive concerts, promises of material well-being and charismatic personalities.

Such evangelism dispenses with the need to embody the message, which ensures the integrity of the Gospel. In wanting to reach out to as many as possible we have made the Gospel into propositional truths that we can disseminate in as many ways as possible. We teach that the power of the Gospel is in the message and the effectiveness of our efforts is in the hands of the Holy Spirit. And so we have instances of people holding up placards saying “John 3:16” in football stadiums. Clearly they do so in faith and obedience but would that be faith in and obedience to what Scripture teaches?

I suspect that we have all come to accept that our Gospel is unattractive to most people and that is why many of us need to be guilt into sharing the Gospel, even to those we love.

But perhaps it is unattractive because we only give it our intellectual assent, our time on Sundays and our last resort when all else fails, and so the Transforming Gospel has no traction in our lives to show the world what it can do. All we want is the ticket to heaven and, God forbid, we might not even have that.

*“They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”*

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.