**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 2:1-7**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%202&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 2:1-7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%202&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. *“You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.”* You can read Luke’s account of Paul’s visit to Philippi and Thessalonica in Acts 16-17. Paul and his companions were attacked, stripped, beaten, flogged and imprisoned in Philippi and yet went on to Thessalonica and continued to share the Gospel. Where did they find the courage to do so?
2. *“For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you.”* Paul made it clear that they could do so because their conscience was clear: they shared the truth with integrity. How can this give you courage and the moral right to speak?
3. *“On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.”* How does Paul regard his position with respect to the Gospel? Do you think this gives us more reason to care about how people feel about our actions or less (because we are not trying to please people)?
4. *“You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. Instead, we were like young children among you.”* How would you describe the principles by which Paul shares the Gospel?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**I THESSALONIANS 2:7-12**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%202&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 2:7-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%202&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. *“Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”* Clearly, Paul and his team did more than just preach the Gospel. How do you think they “cared for you”? Why didn’t they just share the Gospel and move on to another city so as to be able to reach more people?
2. *“Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.”* It would seem that Paul and his team spent a fairly long time with the Thessalonians but made sure they did not presume on their hospitality. Why was this important to Paul? Do you think this is an important principle? Explain.
3. *“You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”* Paul and his team not only spent time in Thessalonica, not only shared their lives with the Thessalonians, not only made sure they were not a burden to them, not only preached the Gospel, but also spent time to encourage, comfort, urge and inspire those who responded to the Gospel to live lives worthy of God. In other words they made sure that those who responded to the Gospel were established in their faith. They did not specialise in evangelism and left the task of follow-up to others but were involved in every aspect of the spiritual journey of the Thessalonians. Do you think this is something good or an inefficient way of carrying out Jesus’ commission? Should this approach to care for the whole person be something modern Christians take up as well?
4. How would you describe Paul’s approach to evangelism? Would this be something you would want to also shape your own approach?

# Friday and Saturday

[**I THESSALONIANS 2:13-20**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%202&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 2:13-20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Thessalonians%202&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. *“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.”* It is a wonderful experience to see the Gospel work in the heart of someone. While you may need to explain or clarify, you have no need to convict and convince. The Gospel is not the word of man, but the word of God. What do you think makes the difference in how a person receives the Gospel?
2. *“For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out.”* What could cause someone to embrace a faith that will cause suffering because the community you live with are opposed to it? There is a history of persecution of Christians all through the centuries. Is your own experience similar, or has there been no difficulty at all in your own experience of being a Christian?
3. *“They displease God and are hostile to everyone in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last. But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way.”* Why do you think God allows such opposition and persecution, even to the extent that Paul’s efforts were blocked? What then should our expectation be when we seek to do God’s will? How should we cope with and respond to the expectation that things may not come our way?
4. *“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.”* What were the Thessalonians, as people who have become Christians when he shared with them the Gospel, to Paul? Why does Paul regard them in this way? What does this tell you about how he regards his own commission to preach the Gospel?

# Sunday

**OUR GLORY AND JOY**

*“For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.”*

There is a difference, isn’t there, between receiving a commission and doing what we can to fulfil it and being given a task by God, seeing it as a wonderful privilege and honour, having a deep desire not to fail God by doing the task sloppily or with disregard to his values and principles (and therefore dishonouring him), and desiring with all your heart to fulfil that task in the best way possible, not only because it is an honour but also because it is a way to express your gratitude at being entrusted with such a commission.

Would we honour God in the same way as Paul did, in the things he entrusts to us?

In this chapter, Paul did not say it explicitly, but as you read how carefully he went about sharing the Gospel, you can see how highly he views his commission.

Paul was clearly conscious that he was doing his job under the gaze of God. Therefore, there is no thought of trying to bring people into the kingdom through underhanded ways. “On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.”

But beyond the rejection of underhanded ways to get results was the embrace of a generous love, a sharing of life, a commitment to doing everything within his power to care for the Thessalonians and to reflect the integrity of the message. “You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.”

Paul understands that the job does not come with a golden ticket that ensures smooth success. There were times when he had to try again and again and again. He understands that he cannot offer prosperity, healing, the resolution of all problems, or even a life of peace and joy, free from suffering. He offers what God offers: the truth of Christ and the way of salvation. And the Thessalonians responded to his word as the word of God. And then Paul went on to spend even more time with them to help them walk on in the truth of God.

Paul did not tell us what it means to him to be “approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel” but he tells us in no uncertain terms what those who respond to the Gospel meant to him:

*“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not 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.