**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

[**GALATIANS 1:6-2:3**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%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 the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [GALATIANS 1:6-2:3](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%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. *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!”* Essentially these people were teaching that the core path to the Kingdom of God is the Jewish faith (symbolised by circumcision and adherence to the Law) and Christians still need to get on this path by practising the Jewish faith. Paul says that it is not important WHO is teaching, the gospel is the gospel of Jesus Christ and if it deviates from the centrality of Jesus, then the person is perverting the gospel. With all the different things that are being taught as Christian teaching these days, do you think they are all the same truth? Do you understand the faith you are standing on, or are you relying on the person who is teaching you this faith?
2. *“I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”* Paul made it very clear that it was not a question of religion but the truth that God had revealed to him and helped him understand his plan for salvation. He was not talking about special revelation, but rather the Word of God, where Jesus Christ is at its core. He took the time to study the Scriptures. Do you think this is important for every Christian or just those who have to teach?
3. *“Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother. … I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain.”* Paul also checked to make sure that his understanding of the Gospel is consistent with that of the apostles. He was not a radical or rebel but respected the community. Does this go against his claim that his gospel was not influenced by men? Why was this important?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**GALATIANS 2:4-14**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%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 [GALATIANS 2:4-14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%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. *“This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism …”* Paul’s central concern was the truth of the Gospel. He was not shy to call what was being taught a “false gospel” and said that these people who were teaching these things were false believers. He made it clear that reputation does not validate truth. It does not mean that someone highly reputed must be right and a common person who learned otherwise from Scripture must be wrong. Truth stands for itself. Do you think it is important to protect the truth? Won’t this lead to quarrels? How then do we ascertain the truth of the Gospel for ourselves? Does everyone really have to study the bible and learn from it?
2. *“When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.”* It would seem that in those days there was a cultural taboo for Jews to eat with Gentiles for fear of defilement. Even if Peter refrained from eating with the Gentiles so as not to upset those Jews, in doing so he was upholding the notion that there is a spiritual difference between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Do you think Paul was too fussy about such matters or would you say that as Christians we should not uphold the taboos of our culture, be they superstition, or worse, racialism?
3. *“When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”* Paul called out Peter’s hypocrisy publicly. Do you think he should have done so privately instead?

# Friday and Saturday

[**GALATIANS 2:15-21**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%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 [GALATIANS 2:15-21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians%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. *“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”* Paul spelled out the spiritual bias of the Jews ( claiming Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles) and contrasted that notion with the Gospel truth (everyone, including Jews, is justified by faith in Christ and not by works). Is it possible to maintain the integrity of the Gospel while we practise inequality (“high esteem / low esteem”, “learned / uneducated”, “titled / common”) or are these inequalities natural and acceptable? Do cultural notions of inequality affect our understanding of the Gospel?
2. *“But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.”* The argument was that for Jews to be considered on par with sinners would be a step down and a win for sin, but Paul argues that the real sin is to take back what we had confessed (when submitting to the Gospel we accept the forgiveness of our sin through faith in Jesus Christ). The point he makes is that we must live by the truth of our confession. Do you agree that the Gospel should define who we are as Christians?
3. *“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* Paul restates the Gospel in these terms: in faith a Christian is a person who has died and now lives with Christ in his place. They do this trusting that Jesus has reclaimed them from God’s condemnation through his sacrifice. In love he has now set them on a new path to live for God with the resources and power of the Holy Spirit. This is the only truth that will save us. Do you agree? What are the implications that as Christians we have died and now Christ lives in us?

# Sunday

**THE GOSPEL TRUTH**

*“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!”*

Paul could not have used stronger words: “If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!” Make no mistake, Paul is saying that it is not about WHO but about WHAT. We can be tempted to say that it was easy in those days because you could depend on the Apostles but today we do not have the Apostles with us to authenticate the message but that would be wrong. Anybody can be preaching a false Gospel and you can only determine the truth from Scripture. Even Peter could get it wrong sometimes. The truth is the Gospel that came from Jesus Christ.

He describes to us the core truth of that Gospel: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

When you look at it, and you contrast it with the teaching that the “circumcision group”, or Judaizers, espoused, you can then see the difference clearly: in the true Gospel, Jesus is clearly at the centre while in the Gospel of the Judaizers, the Law is at the centre; in the true Gospel, it is the accomplishment of Christ that makes all the difference, while in the Gospel of the Judaizers, the accomplishment of man by fulfilling the law is what counts.

Those of us who are not Jews may ask, “what has all this to do with me?” The relevance is in Paul’s earlier assertion, that it is vital that we live by the Gospel Truth as taught in the Word of God.

For the Galatians, they were swayed by the Judaizers, likely because they had impressive Jewish credentials. For us though, all manner of Christian teaching inundates us and we are hard put to know where we should put our trust. Are we saved once for all and we can never lose our salvation, or only those who persevere to the end shall be saved? Are we persuaded by Calvinism that raises the sovereign choice of God above all else, or do we think that man’s choice, and therefore, man’s responsibility, is at the core of the Gospel? Can we claim the good life as the intent of God for our Christian experience? Can we expect to be victorious over sin and evil in this life? Is it true that our initial baptism into the church as a result of our confession of repentance and faith must be followed by a second baptism, the baptism of the Holy Spirit or we will remain carnal Christians, whatever that means?

The modern church is full of teaching that claims to be the answer for what often is our own insipid Christian experience. We need to go through this programme, or this experience, or this type of worship, or this way of praying, or to be in this church, shepherded by this pastor. The focus shifts away from Christ, and makes our actions the significant factor.

Paul tells us that the Gospel is predicated on the experience of death and resurrection. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we surrender ourselves to our death, so that we might live again with Christ living in our stead. Our Christian experience, our growth and maturity, is founded on us accepting that indeed we have died, indeed we are no longer under the power of sin, indeed we are not condemned, indeed God loves us and recognises us as his children, and in our stead, in our place, Christ lives in us and we learn to let our body obey him and his will.

The real wrong that we do is when we try to rebuild what was destroyed, that is, when we let the self assert itself again in the body. Instead we should let our faith in the Son of God, who loved us and sacrificed himself for us, lead us to trust him more to shape our life and being. It is not that this “death and resurrection” will happen all at once—God does not transform us by force; he transforms us by grace—and we must understand that John the Baptizer’s observation, “he must increase, but I must decrease” is the way of the Gospel.

*“The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

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.