**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

[**MATTHEW 25:1-13**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2025&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 [MATTHEW 25:1-13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2025&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. *“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.”* Note that the text tells us that the parable is about what the kingdom of heaven is like. What differentiated the wise from the foolish? What is the significance of taking extra oil for the lamps? Why would people NOT take extra oil with them?
2. *“The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.”* There is no need to figure out the “virgins” and the “bridegroom” and the “wedding banquet”. The key point is that they were ready and because of that they could go in and after that the door was shut. What is the message that Jesus wants to convey with this parable? What is the most important thing in the situation that Jesus described?
3. *Later the others also came. “Lord, Lord,” they said, “open the door for us!” But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.”* What was the fate of those who were not ready when the time came? What was the most important thing that they lacked?
4. *“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”* While the parable can be applied to the situation of Christians and non-Christians (one prepared for judgement by the blood of Christ and the other found to be lacking in righteousness and have no other resource), it may also be applied to Christians who take care to obey (and continue to express their faith) and those who neglect their Christian obligations to grow in christlikeness (and may be found, too late, that their faith is not real, receiving the dreaded “I don’t know you”). From what you have learned, what do you think Jesus is teaching us about the kingdom of heaven? What is he warning us about?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**MATTHEW 25:14-30**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2025&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 [MATTHEW 25:14-30](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2025&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. *“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.”* “Again, it will be like …” tells us that this parable is also about what the kingdom of heaven is like. It is likely that the scenario is about people in a church community, with a master (Christ), who is going away (his ascension into heaven), entrusting resources with his servants (the church). What do you think are resources Christ has entrusted with every individual Christian when he ascended to heaven? What does it mean that everyone in the parable was entrusted with different amounts?
2. *“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”* Note that the commendation is the same for the first two servants even though the results were not. What is it that is important to the master? Note that the reward for faithfulness is more responsibilities! What do you think about that? What do you think is implied by “Come and share your master’s happiness!”?
3. *“Master,” he said, “I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.”* This servant thinks that it is useless to do anything because the Master would just take what he produces—he gains nothing—and so he had no motivation to do anything with what he was given. What about you? Are you motivated to serve the Master or you only wish to do the bare minimum?
4. The point about using the funds to earn interest should not be taken to mean anything more than the fact that even with the misguided assessment the servant had of the master, there was still something better he could have done than burying the money. The damning conclusion was that the issue was not with the master (as the servant suggested) but with the servant, thus earning him the rebuke “You wicked, lazy servant!” Could you think of some possibilities that certain attitudes towards our Christian obligations may earn such a rebuke from God?
5. *“So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* The net result is not so much that the one who did well received more (although it gives you a sense of how God thinks and acts), but that the one who did nothing lost everything, including his right to be in the master’s house. Do you think the master’s response was justified? Do you think it implies that a Christian may lose his place in the kingdom of God?

# Friday and Saturday

[**MATTHEW 25:31-46**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2025&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 [MATTHEW 25:31-46](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2025&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. *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.”* This is not a parable; Jesus is not telling us about what the kingdom of God is like here, but painting a picture about what will happen when he comes again. What does the picture of Jesus on the throne tell you about what is happening in the scene?
2. *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*” One group received this reward in judgement. What did they do to deserve this? Do you think it is significant that they were not aware that they were doing things that were judged favourably by Jesus? What do you think it implies?
3. *“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”* This other group received the same fate as the devil and his minions; in other words, they were judged to be no different from the devil. What did these people do (or not do)? Do you think this is literally about prison visits, cups of cold water and feeding the hungry or is there a more general principle being taught here? What do you think Jesus is teaching here?
4. *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.”* The kingdom of God is open to those who love (and are kind) to their neighbour while those who have no love (and kindness) are no different from the devil. Do you think Jesus is saying this of everyone in general, or particularly those who claim to be Christians?
5. What are the key truths that Jesus was teaching in all 3 passages about those who will enter the kingdom and those who will be cast into the outer darkness? How should this impact your Christian life?

# Sunday

**SHEEP OR GOAT?**

*“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”*

It is possible to misunderstand the Gospel as a free ticket into the kingdom of heaven because Jesus has paid the fare; it is also possible to approach the Gospel as a way to game the system and avoid the implications; but there are also those who whole-heartedly embrace the opportunity to be free from sin and be in the presence of God, and gratefully respond to God’s generosity by enlarging their hearts and and being a blessing to those around them.

All the parables in this chapter are about people who are of equal standing: The 10 virgins, the 3 servants, and the people who are gathered before the Judge; the difference is in what they did. This is why I think that they represent people who have already responded to the Gospel and are now in church. The way they responded is what differentiates them. 5 virgins did the minimum and were found wanting while the other 5 did more than enough. 2 servants took to their commission with gusto and did the best with what they have. The third thought it was enough not to lose what he was given.

The sheep were not consciously trying to impress the Lord; they were just doing what came naturally. So too the goats; they were naturally selfish and uncaring; they did not attempt to express the love of Christ. Over time these people had become truly sheep and goats. When they first entered the church it might not have been possible to differentiate them. They could enter the kingdom on the basis of their faith at that point in time, just like the thief on the cross next to Jesus. But over time (the bridegroom was delayed), because some did little with what they had, they lost what little that was there. When the time came all Jesus could say to them was “I do not know you”.

Make no mistake: this is what Jesus tells us about what the kingdom of heaven is like.

If you think “being saved” is about going to heaven and not to hell you are only half right. Being invited into heaven or being cast into hell is about who you are, sheep or goats, as Jesus taught here. To want a ticket to heaven is to want to be righteous; the issue was that even though you wanted to be righteous, you could not achieve it. Jesus sacrificed himself for those who want to truly be saved and each one who comes to him receives the seed of the Gospel—justification, and a new beginning, through Jesus’ sacrifice, the love of the Father, the grace to forgive our sin, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, the Scriptures and the Church—more than enough to get you there.

We should take the resources made available to us by him to embrace the life of love that God calls us to, to die and to live in Christ as we journey through life, as Paul taught us in Galatians 2. The bible is clear that none of us will be perfect, but the bible is also clear that who we are will be clear to the One on the throne. The fruit of our life will be the evidence of the state of our heart.

To assume that all you needed to do was to raise that hand and say that prayer, and you can remain unrepentant and persist in unrighteous living, is to run the terrible risk of being found to be a goat after all.

*“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”*

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.