**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

[**LUKE 2:1-7**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%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 [LUKE 2:1-7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%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. *“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.”* This little historical detail locates the birth of Jesus in history. A time when the realm of God entered the realm of man (recall the devotion on Psalm 24). What does this mean to you, that God did not merely talk about love but demonstrated his love in time and space?
2. *“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.”* The Jews understood that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem but Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. Once again, a little historical detail aligned Scripture and reality. What do you think of how God works?
3. *“While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.”* Joseph was not a rich man and had no clout to demand a room for Mary to give birth. Why didn’t God arrange for better conditions for Mary and Joseph? Behind these details is the fact that when the Messiah was born there was no place for him. What is the deeper implication (see John 1:9-13)? How can you make a difference to this sad state of affairs?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**LUKE 2:8-14**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%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 [LUKE 2:8-14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%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 there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.”* As you read this, are there any significant details about the shepherds that would suggest why God sent the angels to them with the news about the birth of Jesus? What then do you think the shepherds represent, as a group of people invited to witness the birth of Jesus?
2. *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”* What details about the birth of Jesus did the angel share? Who is this child to be? What does the birth of this child portend for mankind? Once again, why tell common, uneducated (presumably) shepherds news of such theological import that they could barely grasp?
3. *Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”* Not only did God send an angel to tell these shepherds, he also arranged for an angelic choir to praise him and proclaim his intentions. In this passage, we see God sending his angels to extend an invitation to the shepherds to share in the joy of the birth of his Son, which has a tremendous positive impact on the world. Why and why these shepherds? Who would you have expected God to invite instead?

# Friday and Saturday

[**LUKE 2:15-21**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%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 [LUKE 2:15-21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%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. *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.* With all that happened, the shepherds decided to respond to the invitation. They did and they found the baby as foretold. Essentially, by responding to God’s invitation, they became God’s witnesses. Why were they credible witnesses?
2. *“When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.”* In responding, the shepherds experienced God in real terms (and not just a warm feeling, or an interesting thought or idea) personally and without being told, took their story to all who would listen. And people were amazed. What do you think people would be interested to listen to: your thoughts about God or your experiences of him in real terms? How can we gain such stories that we can share with others?
3. *“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”* Mary had submitted herself to a wild ride, entrusting herself to God and these developments from the announcement about her pregnancy to the birth and the events that surrounded the child, were the treasures that God had in place for Mary, treasures that hold deep meaning for her. Do you treasure your encounters with God (or you barely noticed them)? Is there evidence in your life experiences of the realm of God involved in the realm of your mortal life? Do you think it is possible to have a relationship with God and have no stories to tell?
4. *“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.”* “Just as they had been told” is the repeated pattern throughout the birth of Jesus. It recalls the angel’s assertion, “For no word from God will ever fail.” This is the nature of biblical truth: it is true in life and experience, not just in theory and concept. Is this your experience of biblical truth? Is your response to biblical truth (and to God) in theory and concept (like mental assent and agreement to what he teaches) but not in life and experience (but no real obedience and so no transformation)?

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# Sunday

**AND THERE WERE SHEPHERDS LIVING OUT IN THE FIELDS NEARBY**

*“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

They were shepherds; they were nearby. Clearly we are to understand the “everyman” nature of this group of people that was invited to witness the birth of the Christ.

Why not the religious leaders, who would be in a better position to understand the theological import of the birth? Why not the administrative leaders—the king and noble men—who could have given the child better circumstances to be born into? Well, we are told in Matthew that these people, when they heard the news, plotted to kill the child.

The implication, I think, is this: God takes special care to make sure that the “nobodies” in the world will have their opportunity to also hear and respond to the “good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”

It is not that God avoids people in power and people of learning. The eunuch of Ethiopia and Nicodemus come to mind. I believe that God invited the shepherds who were nearby to witness the birth of the Christ to honour them and to give them (and those in their strata of society) a special advantage in receiving the good news.

Jesus tells us of that day when the goats would be separated out from among the sheep, and he would say to the sheep, “I notice what you did for those who are hungry, thirsty, the stranger, the one who needed clothes, the one who was in prison”. Who are these people? They are the ones society doesn’t see, but God sees, Jesus sees, and the sheep are those who also see. The goats never saw them and so asked, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?”

We are busy paying attention to the rich and powerful, the well-dressed, well-heeled, and well-spoken but on the occasion of the birth of his Son, God sent angels to these shepherds to invite them to see the child.

In today’s world, who would be the shepherds? Yes, obviously those who work on farms, people who live close to the land, but in urban neighbourhoods, they would be the tradespeople, those who wake up early in the day to prepare, buying the things they need for the day, or prepping the goods that they would sell that day. How many of us would notice tradespeople as people who also need to know this “good news that will cause great joy”? God apparently did. Would these people respond to the news? Apparently these did although, truth be told, their experience was nothing short of spectacular; but then, who is to say that God would not extend his hand to give them a special advantage?

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”*

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.