**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 2:21-24, 39-40**](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 2:21-24, 39-40](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. *“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.”* Luke records for us that Jesus was circumcised as per Jewish law and practice and given the name that the angel foretold. Why are these important details? What does it tell you about Joseph and Mary as parents? Would you do your best to bring your child up in the practices of your faith, or would you leave it for them to decide when they come of age? Why?
2. *When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”* Once again we are told that Joseph and Mary made sure that they raised their child in accordance with the law and practices of their faith even though they were too poor to afford to sacrifice anything more than the barest minimum. What does it mean to “consecrate the firstborn male to the Lord”? Would you ever consider something like this?
3. *“In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed the firstborn of both people and animals in Egypt. This is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.’ And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand.”* Read Exodus 13, especially vv8-10, 14-16. The Jewishlaw and practices become teaching opportunities for parents to help their children know and appreciate the history of God’s intervention. Do you teach your children to know and understand why you worship and obey God?
4. *“When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.”* Do you think there is a relationship between the kind of parents Joseph and Mary were, and the growth and development of the child in the wisdom and grace of God, or was it all supernaturally accomplished by the Holy Spirit?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**LUKE 2:25-38**](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 2:25-38](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. *“It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.”* Why did God accord such a special honour to Simeon? How would you interpret his prophecy?
2. *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.* What does it mean to the parents, hearing such a prophecy?
3. What about Anna — *“She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.”* — what do you think of her style of piety?
4. On the one hand, shepherds who were nearby, on the other, Magi, foreigners who probably practised mystical arts, and now, these two very old and very pious Jews; these were the people God took special effort to introduce to his Son. What can you learn about how God looks at people?

# Friday and Saturday

[**LUKE 2:41-52**](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 2:41-52](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. *“Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.”* Why do you think Luke told us this story?
2. *“After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”* Do you think this is natural, supernatural, or that as Son of God he already has a complete understanding of God’s word? What is the point that Luke wants to make?
3. *“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”* Do you think the point was that he was conscious of his Sonship, he had a deep affinity for the Scriptures, or this is how a child should be if not for his sinful nature, or that this was how he became conscious of the offensive trading going on in the temple courts? What does this demonstrate about the concerns of Jesus, even before his public ministry? Do you think it is possible to teach a child to understand and appreciate God’s word, to love being in God’s house, or would they think of the stories as myths and would have to be forced to go to church?
4. *“Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”* There was, clearly, no sense of arrogance, or that Jesus was uncaring about his parents. He had an affinity for the things of God, and the word of God. In all that has been said about Jesus as a child, what do you imagine him to be like: a fun-loving, kind-hearted happy child or a serious, melancholic and sensitive child?

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# Sunday

**RIGHTEOUS AND DEVOUT**

*“She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.”*

“Righteous and devout” are terms that are not highly sought-after these days; in fact, they are downright old-fashioned. Along with words like “piety, sacrifice, obey, self-denial”, they are rarely found in the modern Christian vocabulary.

Part of the problem was the way Paul attacked these virtues because they were abused by the religious elite to elevate themselves while denigrating others. In Philippians 3, Paul wrote, “If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”

However, we must not make the mistake of thinking that religious devotion is something false to be despised, and react by tossing aside these time-honoured practices that can do much to train the mind and body to obey God. Remember Jesus telling us, in Matthew 5, “Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

The modern Christian has few, if any, practices that they adopt as expressions of their faith and devotion. Everything is sacrificed on the altar of convenience and urgency. How many of us devote time everyday to pray and meditate on God’s Word, set aside a portion of our resources to give to the poor, pledge some of our time and energy to serve God in practical ways—serving food to the poor in a soup kitchen, giving tuition to refugee children, visiting the sick in hospital, or even prisoners—and adopt a lifestyle of discipline, to live with less and to learn to be happy with what we have rather than crave after the things that the rest of the world crave after?

From their practices, Joseph and Mary were devout Jews, making sure that they comply and obey the requirements of the Law, and along the way, they brought up Jesus to be someone who deeply identified with his faith, with a love for God’s word and the intelligence to inquire and understand better what God desires of man.

We see God honouring these two individuals, Simeon and Anna, for their devotion, and out of that devotion, they had developed a deep understanding and appreciation of who the child was and what he would accomplish. How else would we know and serve God, unless we are devoted to him and all he stands for? How else would our children become devoted Christians, unless we train them up in our faith from young: “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

*“And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.”*

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.