[**TIME ALONE WITH GOD**](http://timealonewithgod.org/)

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

[**MATTHEW 6:1-4**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%206&version=NIV)

1. Take time to be quiet, until you can focus on being in the presence of God. Read the text until you can understand what it says. If you have any initial thoughts, write them down.
2. *“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them.”* Having told us that we are the light of the world and we are to “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven”, now Jesus tells us not to practice our righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. Do you think there is a difference in what Jesus means? Was Jesus just inconsistent?
3. *“... as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others.”* Here is the crux of Jesus’ meaning: one is genuine love that responds to the people around, the other is a fake love displayed to elicit the adulation and honor of others. The point of fake love (or acts of fake love) is that they arise out of self-interest and are not intended to glorify God. Do you think the problem today is that there is a lot of fake love and very little real love, or there is very little love, fake or otherwise, and people just act out of self-interest, or there is no problem at all?
4. *“... so that your giving may be in secret?”* Do we really need to hide our giving or is it good enough that we are clear that our giving is genuinely without self-interest or that genuine giving that is not hidden runs the risk of the praise of man, thus muddying our motivations? What do you think Jesus’ concerns are here? *“Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”* Don’t we then run the risk of giving for the sake of the reward? Why does Jesus tell us that God will reward us?
5. Are you fake or hypocritical or genuinely selfish, or are you genuinely working out your piety? Write down a prayer in response.

# Tuesday

[**MATTHEW 6:1-4**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%206&version=NIV)

1. Take time to be quiet, until you can focus on being in the presence of God. If you have any initial thoughts, write them down.
2. Read the passage. Review the answers/thoughts you wrote down yesterday. Is there anything that you need to respond to?
3. Review the past day. What concerns/joys/events occupy your heart?
4. Write down a prayer in response.

# Wednesday

[**MATTHEW 6:5-15**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%206&version=NIV)

1. Take time to be quiet, until you can focus on being in the presence of God. Read the text until you can understand what it says. If you have any initial thoughts, write them down.
2. *“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others.”* Simply put, don’t pray for the ears of people but for the ears of God. Is a well-crafted (or prepared) prayer lacking in genuine intent then? Are worship meetings or prayer meetings (where prayer is intended to be heard by others) breeding grounds for hypocrisy? How can we pray public prayers genuinely? Can we be hypocritical in private prayers?
3. *“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.”* Babbling: perhaps the use of repeated phrases or repetitious prayers or formulae. Many words: It connotes adding empty phrases that do not mean anything except perhaps to impress or inflate. *“... for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”* What is wrong with this? Is Jesus complaining about the way we pray? Is he telling us, “keep it brief”? If God already knows, why even pray?
4. The use of the Lord’s Prayer here is to illustrate how we just need to say what we mean and mean what we say to God. (2021 Week 15 focuses on the prayer itself in Luke 11.) Should we just repeat this prayer whenever we pray? What do you think our Lord wants us to learn about praying from this example prayer of his?
5. *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”* Do you think Jesus really means it that when we are unforgiving we will be unforgiven; what about for example 1 John 1:9 that promises forgiveness without caveats? Do you think the issue is only about forgiveness? What do you think must be the link between our prayers and our lives if God is going to positively listen to our prayers?
6. Write a prayer to God in response.

# Thursday

[**MATTHEW 6:5-15**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%206&version=NIV)

1. Take time to be quiet, until you can focus on being in the presence of God. If you have any initial thoughts, write them down.
2. Read the passage. Review the answers/thoughts you wrote down yesterday. Is there anything that you need to respond to?
3. Review the past day. What concerns/joys/events occupy your heart?
4. Write down a prayer in response.

# Friday

[**MATTHEW 6:16-18**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%206&version=NIV)

1. Take time to be quiet, until you can focus on being in the presence of God. Read the text until you can understand what it says. If you have any initial thoughts, write them down.
2. *“But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting ...”* Why is our Lord so vehemently against actions that are “for show” or “pretend-pretend”? Why does he so strongly forbid hypocrisy? If our obedience genuinely is difficult and costly to us (for example when we are genuinely hungry from our fast), is it wrong to show it or should we pretend that it is OK?
3. *“... but only to your Father, who is unseen.”* God sees and God knows and God responds. Do you believe this?
4. *“... and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”* Reward has been mentioned several times. Why does Jesus emphasise that God will reward our genuine piety? What do you think is the reward?
5. How would you characterise your relationship with God? How do you think God feels about it? Write down a prayer in response.

# Saturday

[**MATTHEW 6:16-18**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%206&version=NIV)

1. Take time to be quiet, until you can focus on being in the presence of God. If you have any initial thoughts, write them down.
2. Read the passage. Review the answers/thoughts you wrote down yesterday. Is there anything that you need to respond to?
3. Review the past day. What concerns/joys/events occupy your heart?
4. Write down a prayer in response.

# Sunday

**TRUE PIETY**

In a very real sense, if your relationship with God is genuine this passage will not worry you. You know Jesus is talking about someone else. If your heart is in the right place, it doesn’t matter if your prayer, or your fasting or your giving is seen by others. Because that does not matter to you. If your piety is on public display, it was probably for some other reason, and not because you wanted the credit from people around you, nor was it actually false piety.

But if you examine Jesus’ words carefully, he actually was not speaking to the hypocritical. He was speaking to the genuine and teaching them to avoid the behaviour of the hypocritical. The clue is in vv7-8, *“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”*

*“They think they will be heard because of their many words.”* Hypocrites think that God is also hypocritical. God likes big numbers. Lavish words, lavish actions, lavish gestures, lavish expenditure befits God. Harsh discipline, painful sacrifices, self-denial—these are what pleases God. But we too can be caught up in this game and misjudge God. Is it not true thof our demonstrations of piety these days are tied up with symbols: words of love, praise, dedication, humility and even contrition; acts like raising hands, kneeling, stoking of emotions; offerings of praise, clap offerings, even our gifts and tithes are symbols. As in all symbols, they are all cheap (or cheaper) substitutes for the real things.

But these are not what God responds to. *“If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.” “Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”* (and it is not from God because they pander to a very different person.) God who “owns the cattle on a thousand hills” has no need. And as Jesus said, he doesn’t even need you to tell him what you need! He knows!

The key is at the end: *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*

As you are kind and generous, so too God is kind and generous. As you love, so too God loves. As you are forgiving, so too God is forgiving. As you desire to draw close to God, so too God desires to draw close to you. This is what Christian piety is. And this is how our being salt and light can be so powerful, and can be such a blessing. It is not about “pleasing God” in the sense that God desires our gifts and sacrifices, our words of praise and worship, our demonstrations and expressions of love and humility; it is about giving physical expression to his image in us, so that the world will know him for who he truly is. This is when we truly honour him and worship him. And then he is pleased to reward us with his response.

1. Take time to be quiet, until you can focus on being in the presence of God. If you have any initial thoughts, write them down.
2. Review the answers/thoughts you wrote down in the past week. What conclusion can you draw from the passages of Scripture you have been considering? Is there anything that you need to respond to?
3. Read the short sharing above. Do they add anything to your own conclusions?
4. Review the past week. What concerns/joys/events occupy your heart?
5. Write down a prayer in response.