**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 13:10-17**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2013&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 [MATTHEW 13:10-17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2013&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. *“Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 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.”* Jesus says that in spiritual matters, there are two groups of people: those who have (and will get more) and those who do not have (and will lose what they already have). What separates those who have and those who do not have? Is it God’s choice or is it the state of their heart?
2. Is it possible for people in one group to end up in the other group? Explain your reasoning.
3. *“But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”* Do you regard the spiritual truths you learn from the Bible, the reality of forgiveness and reconciliation with God, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in you, as treasure that God has blessed you with?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**MATTHEW 13:1-9, 18-23**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2013&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 13:1-9, 18-23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2013&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 anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart.*” “Understand” would be as Jesus says it in v15, “understand with their heart”, grasping the import of what God is doing. With such people, what should we do since sowing the seed makes no difference. Do you have friends whom you think are in such a state?
2. *“The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.”* Why would a person receive the gospel enthusiastically yet fall away just as quickly when problems come? What causes the ground to be “rocky”, making it difficult for the gospel to take root? What can we do if we know of someone in such a state?
3. *“The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.”* Do you think the thorns refer to problems we face in life (like the troubles and persecution faced by the rocky soil)? What do you think is the issue here? How is thorny soil different from the rocky soil? What can we do if we know of a fellow believer in such a situation, or even that you are such a person?
4. *“But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”* Jesus says that the key is that they “understand” the gospel. What do you think it means? Jesus emphasises that these people are abundantly fruitful. What do you think is the key point that Jesus wants to get across to you in this parable?

# Friday and Saturday

[**MATTHEW 13:24-30, 36-43**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2013&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 13:24-30, 36-43](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2013&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. *“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil.”* In telling you this parable, what is Jesus saying about the people in the world?
2. *“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.”* The idea is that in dealing with the weeds you may harm the wheat. The instances of direct judgement frequently found in the old testament are rarely seen in the new testament. Moreover, in the context of the kingdom and the gospel, what may be weeds may become wheat. And so a decision is made to let things be until the harvest. Jesus however did not dwell on this in his explanation; only that there will be a final reckoning. Would you draw any significance from this detail in the story?
3. *“The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”* The efforts of the enemy will be thwarted and destroyed. The seed of the Son will prosper. Why does Jesus want to emphasise this in a parable?

# Sunday

##### SEEDS, WEEDS AND SECRETS

*“Whoever has ears, let them hear.”*

In the first parable, the focus is on the soil. The seed is good seed, but bad soil can damage the crop and affect the fruit.

The issue is not whether the produce that came out of rocky soil and those full of thorns are acceptable to the sower (as in, are they saved?) It is that the condition of our heart will affect the work of the seed. The wayside heart was indifferent. The rocky heart was not willing to pay the price while the heart with thorns harboured competing interests. None of them acknowledged the true value of the seed.

The most crucial quality in those who hear the Gospel is “understanding”, which Jesus elaborates to mean not just receptivity but also appreciating the import and value of what is behind it all. The ones who understand, who see and who hear, will turn and reach for the life-giving truth that the Gospel speaks of. There are those who never heard—the Gospel was just noise; those who heard selectively, only drawn to the Gospel superficially—perhaps to the nice bits; and those who heard and understood but could not appreciate the import and value of what Jesus offers over and above the many other concerns of life.

It is a central biblical truth that our salvation (the seed) is by grace and not in any way earned. The soil did not do anything to produce the seed. All the different types of ground received the seed. It was freely given by the Sower. But this parable tells us that the ability of the seed to grow and produce fruit does depend on our receptivity. We should not mistake one for the other.

And that is the point of Jesus’ assertion that there are those who have and will have more, and those who do not, and will lose even what they already have. If you do not appreciate and value what Jesus offers, you place yourself among those who will lose what they already have. You need to understand who you are, and who God is and realise that this is the nature of the Gospel: you have to turn and take hold of what he offers—he will not force himself on where he is not welcome.

In the second parable the focus is on the seed: there is the good seed sown by the Son of Man, and there is the bad seed sown by the enemy. Both are allowed to thrive but only the good seed will stand when the harvest comes. When that time comes there will be those who will weep and gnash their teeth, and there will be those who will shine like the sun.

It is the seed that determines the identity of what develops. One is from the Son while the other is from the enemy. When the harvest comes, the fate of the plant is determined by what the plant produces. The angels will gather “everything that causes sin and all who do evil” and throw them into the furnace. Who shapes you and gives you your identity is crucial, because it will determine what you produce.

Perhaps the question you hear is which will you be? Or perhaps you hear the quiet assurance that though the wicked thrive alongside the righteous, their fate at the end couldn’t be more different, for the righteous will “shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

*“Whoever has ears, let them hear.”*

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.