**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

[**1 JOHN 3:11-18**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%203&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 [1 JOHN 3:11-18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%203&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. *“For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.”* What do you think John means by “from the beginning” (see v23, where John places the command to love side by side with the command to believe in Jesus)? What is the significance that this message, the command to love one another, was taught to the Christians “from the beginning”? Does “from the beginning” mean anything significant?
2. *“We should love one another.”* What do you think it entails in practical terms? In this context, is “one another” inclusive or exclusive of those who do not follow Jesus?
3. *“Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous.”* Do you think this is about “be like Abel—righteous” or “don’t be like Cain—hated his brother and killed him”?
4. *“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him”* Is love an indicator of our salvation or is salvation depending on our expressing love? Does it mean that when we are saved we automatically find it easy to love, or is it something we might need to work on? Is it a problem if we find that it is difficult for us to love (especially someone whom we have just cause to hate)? How would you rate yourself in the area of “love one another”?
5. *“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.”* What was the goal of Jesus laying down his life for us? Would this show us in what context we should lay down our lives for one another or are there no boundaries as to how we should express love for one another? How can this work out practically (see the example John gives)?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**1 JOHN 3:19-4:6**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%203&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 [1 JOHN 3:19-4:6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%203&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. *“If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.”* Is John saying that while we may think that we are wrong and sinful, God may think differently? Would that be possible? Would that mean that we should ignore our conscience? If we ignore the condemnation of our hearts, how would we know if we are OK? How can we quieten our conscience and be at peace?
2. *“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.”* Why is it that we listen to our heart when it does not condemn us? How can our hearts know that we can have confidence before God?
3. *“And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”* Notice that there are two parts to the command. Is John pushing “salvation by faith and works”? What do you think it means, in the context that our Gospel is “faith alone and not works” (see Ephesians 2:8-9)?
4. *“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”* Read 1 John 3:7-24 to see how John teaches his readers to “test the spirits”. What do you learn from him about this? From what he says, even our conscience can be unreliable; we need to stay close to the Gospel (v23) to stay close to the truth. What role does the Spirit play in helping us discern truth from falsehood?
5. *“We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.”* John makes it clear that when we know God, we will know who to listen to. How can we know God? What should we do with the viewpoint of the world? Does it mean that Christians should reject knowledge that the world possesses and teaches?

# Friday and Saturday

[**1 JOHN 4:7-12**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%204&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 [1 JOHN 4:7-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%204&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. *“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”* John states in no uncertain terms that if we do not love we do not know God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. In this context, do you think “everyone” means everybody or “everybody in the kingdom of God”? Similarly, does “one another” mean everybody or everybody in the kingdom of God? Explain your reasoning. How far do you think this is true and applicable for someone who wants to grow and mature as a Christian? Have you ever considered this to be a vital step for anyone who wants to know God? What would you consider to be a vital step for a person who wants to know God?
2. *“God is love.”* In light of the discussion in question 1, what do you think it means, when John says that the path to knowing God is to embrace loving one another, that God is love?
3. *“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”* How does John characterise the love that God stands for? Do you think this would adequately describe love as God understands and expresses it? When John says that our expression of love for God does not measure up to the standard of love that God exemplifies, is he telling us to do better, or to realise the nature of the relationship between us and God? Why is it important for us to understand the gulf between the expressions of our love for God and that expression of his love for us?

1. *“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”* John calls us to love one another (rather than express our love directly to God) as our logical response to God’s love, but what happens when we embark on this road to love one another? What do you think it means? How do you feel about it?

# Sunday

**GOD IS LOVE**

*“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”*

After making that bombshell theological statement, “God is love”, John takes pains to tell us that “love” is not defined in the way we love God, but in the way God loved us. I used the past tense “loved” because clearly John tells us that what God did through Jesus defines and reveals the love that is encapsulated in that statement, “God is love”. I think that every year (at least) we should meditate on the Gospel to remind, renew and refresh our sense of who our God is.

It is not that we cannot tell God that we love him; after all, the first command is that we are to love God with our all. But interestingly, Jesus quickly adds the second, that we should love our neighbour and to me it sends a message: to express our love for God we should love our neighbour (rather than use words, sacrifice, self-discipline, etc). We must not think that his love for us is like our love for him. We must appreciate that we (and the way we love or even understand love) are not on the same level as God. We must not presume that our expressions of love for him are adequate and acceptable to him. God is the one to tell us what he will accept: that we love our neighbour as ourselves.

John reveals to us that more than a means to express our love for God, loving others around us (neighbour, brother and sister) is also the means by which we grow as Christians in being sanctified (God lives in us) and in being glorified (his love is made complete in us). Love is the path that all Christians must embark upon if they are to grow and mature and that is why we are called to “love one another” (that is, among our brothers and sisters in the Lord). This is the training ground for us to grow and mature, without restricting us from the larger command to love our neighbour as ourselves.

“God is love” is not about us; we must not understand it in terms of how much he loves us. It is a theological statement of who he is, and thus, what he infuses into his whole creation. It explains why sin is so intolerable. It also tells us that wherever love (as God expressed through his Son’s sacrifice) is expressed, God is pleased and his goodness flows. Love therefore must be the primary blessing we bring wherever we are sent.

This is not about big statements of love but, as Jesus pointed out, even in simple acts of kindness like sharing a cup of cold water, bringing warmth and comfort to the cold, the sick and to the prisoner: “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

*“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”*

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.