**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

[**JONAH 1:1-17**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah+1&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 [JONAH 1:1-17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah+1&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. *Nineveh was the flourishing capital of the Assyrian Empire and was the home of King Sennacherib, King of Assyria, during the Biblical reign of King Hezekiah and the lifetime of Judean prophet Isaiah (Wikipedia).* What did God want Jonah to do? Do you think it is unusual for God to communicate with a foreign country about its moral behaviour? Why send Jonah?
2. *“But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.”* Why did Jonah refuse God’s call? What did he want and what did he not want?
3. How did God respond to Jonah’s refusal? Why would God go through all that trouble? Do you think it is possible that God may have a similar kind of relationship with you as you walk with him? What might he want to achieve with you?
4. *“He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.) … Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”* To the sailors the worst thing you can do is to upset a powerful God. And yet they hesitated to throw Jonah overboard. Why? From the time he refused God’s call up to this point when he wanted to spare the sailors from his problems, what can you admire about Jonah?
5. *“At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.”* This may seem to be an accidental result of Jonah’s disobedience, yet could it be not an accident that Jonah got into a ship with these men?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**JONAH 2:1-10**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah%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 the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [JONAH 2:1-10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah%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. *“From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God.”* Interestingly, Jonah prayed to the God he was disobedient to, about circumstances he is now in by the hand of the God he is praying to. What do you think Jonah’s view of God is like? Do you think Jonah at this point was repentant?
2. *“You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’”* Why was Jonah so resolved to look towards God despite all that God had done to him and even convinced that he had been banished from God’s sight? How would you have responded if you were in Jonah’s circumstances, suffering from your deliberate disobedience against God, knowing you have no excuse to offer?
3. *“The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.”* In the depths, with no control over his circumstances, feeling like he is lost forever, Jonah still felt the presence of God, even though he had been disobedient to him and was trying to run away from him. How would you describe the God that Jonah knew?
4. *When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. “Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”* And so Jonah prayed for his own salvation from his own disobedience, to the God he had disobeyed. What can you learn from Jonah’s relationship with his God?

# Friday and Saturday

[**JONAH 3:1-4:11**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah%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 the past day. Share with God what you thought or felt. Pray also for those he has laid on your heart.
2. Read [JONAH 3:1-4:11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah%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. *“Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.”* What happened as a response to Jonah’s message from God? How did God respond to their repentance?
2. *But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”* Jonah wanted God to destroy Nineveh, an enemy and a threat to Israel, but God instead sent Jonah to warn Nineveh and gave them a chance to repent. Knowing his own country may be overrun by the Assyrians, what do you think of Jonah’s reasoning and motivation? Was it wrong for Jonah to want bad things to happen to his enemies?
3. *But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”* How would you answer this in Jonah’s circumstances? Explain your answer.
4. *“Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint.”* This action shows us that all along God intended to teach Jonah and help him understand. Do you think it is possible that sometimes God’s actions in your life are intended to teach and help you to expand your understanding?
5. *But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”* What is the point that God wants Jonah to learn about Him and about his compassion? Do you think it makes sense for God to make the sacrifice of Jesus available to everyone, even those whom you think do not deserve compassion? Why does God want to do this? How do you think God feels when he has to go into destruction mode in judgement and whole communities and populations are wiped out?
6. Do you think God’s example in this story should have any bearing on how you act towards others whom you do not like or appreciate for one reason or another?

# Sunday

**THE GOD OF COMPASSION**

*But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” “It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”*

God’s relationship with Jonah is truly fascinating. Jonah knew God to be “the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land”, yet he felt free to be totally honest, totally real, before God; even free to be angry at God.

God must have known how Jonah felt about Nineveh. Likely there were many prayers offered, asking God to destroy this great nation that was threatening the very existence of Israel. As the sin of Nineveh piled up, hopes were high that God would indeed act against it.

And so when God sent Jonah to preach against it, Jonah didn’t want to. He wanted no warning, no second chance; he wanted God to destroy Nineveh for her sins.

Clearly Jonah did not count on God pursuing him. He knew he had gone too far; yet, in the belly of the fish, he asked for a second chance. And God gave him that chance and repeated his instructions which Jonah this time complied with. But when Nineveh responded to the message in repentance and God relented, Jonah was upset again.

*“I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.”*

Jonah wanted God to be gracious and compassionate to him and his country; but not to his enemies. Here lies the error in Jonah’s relationship with God.

Jonah exists to serve God; God does not exist to serve Jonah.

Perhaps at some point we need to examine our own attitude and relationship with God and learn to see things from his point of view. Perhaps we need to see in the things that are happening to us and around us God’s hand and intentions to help us grow out of the restrictions of our presumptions and our self-centred point of view. Perhaps we need to see how even as we think we are serving him (or not serving him as in the case of Jonah) that he is actually graciously serving us and teaching us. But at some point, we need to realise that he is the centre of the universe, not us; his concerns matter for all, and for eternity, while ours often matter only to us, and only for a fleeting moment.

This story of God teaching Jonah patiently is a wonderful lesson in how God may act in our lives. But for me, my heart is drawn to that group of sailors who did not want to kill an innocent man. Somehow God arranged it for Jonah to be on their ship and in the course of Jonah’s journey, these sailors came to know of “the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” Even when he was running away, God could still use Jonah to accomplish his purpose. What a wonderful God we serve!

*“At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to 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.