**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

[**PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%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 [PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%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. *“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy …” (ESV).* “So”, or “therefore” in NIV, looks back to the previous passage where Paul tells the Philippians that suffering and conflict lies ahead for them. “If there is any …” should not be understood to suggest doubt of existence, but rather in terms of “as long as there is any …”. Thus, “As long as the fundamentals of church life are still in place, let them take you one step further by being of the same mind …”. The idea is that we must let the fundamentals align us to our primary identity as the body of Christ. Take a long look at what is described here as “fundamentals”—in Christ, in Love, in the Spirit—and ask yourself whether your church solidly (or perhaps not so solidly but at least showing some, as “any” might imply) rests on these fundamentals. If these fundamentals are there, then surely there is encouragement, comfort, engagement, affection and sympathy. Are you willing to let these fundamentals lead and guide you as a church or community, despite disagreements and ill-feelings.
2. *“… then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”* There can be no like-mindedness between light and darkness, right and wrong, love and hate, good and bad. But if all are in Christ, all love one another and the church, all claim to be led by the Spirit, and all work hard to maintain their affection and sympathy for one another — these must be in place for like-mindedness to prosper — then come together to agree. In this context, would we be in danger of compromising by seeking to be like-minded and of one spirit and of one mind? What would we be compromising by refusing to be like-minded and of sone spirit and of one mind? The idea of one spirit and one mind is to be united behind the agreed upon agenda. Do you think this is possible? What are the things that shape your thinking, feeling, decisions and actions focused upon where the church is concerned? Are they the fundamental truths of what a church is and is to be, or are they your own feelings, agenda, hurts, complaints?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**PHILIPPIANS 2:3-8**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%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 [PHILIPPIANS 2:3-8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%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. *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”* Paul is saying this in context of the unity of the church. In the issues, conflicts and disagreements in the church that you know of or are involved in, how will Paul’s appeal shape your contribution to the church and to the unity of the church? Why is it difficult or painful to follow what Paul recommends?
2. *“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus …”* In the description following this (vv6-8), how would you describe the mindset of our Lord?
3. In John 13, Jesus told his disciples after washing their feet, *When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”* Jesus pointedly said this of the disciples’ relationship with one another. We love and serve one another because Jesus loved and served us. Take some time to respond to him.

# Friday and Saturday

[**PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%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 [PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%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. *“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place …”* How did God respond to Jesus’ actions that stem from his mindset? How would you think God will respond to the actions you take to do as Jesus did in humbling yourself, prioritising the good of others, even at times to the detriment of your own interests? Is it good enough for you to trust God to respond to you and your needs and interests according to his will and purpose?
2. *“… and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* In saying that Jesus has been given the place of exaltation, Paul suggests that we likewise should bow before him and acknowledge his Lordship, as we navigate the relationships and decisions in church. Do you think this would mean that we allow ourselves to be swallowed up by the agenda of others in the church, and our voices to be drowned by the voices of others? How can we navigate between the interests of others and our own interests, the views of others and our own views, as we work towards being like-minded?
3. Do you think Paul’s idea of the church is “anti-individualism”? What is the place of growing to be, and serving as, unique individuals in the church?

# Sunday

**UNITY IN THE CHURCH**

*“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”*

It is important for us to understand what are fundamentals and what flows from those fundamentals. From what Paul wrote, being united with Christ (or “fellowship” as John tells us, or “abiding” as Jesus told the disciples), and walking in the Spirit, are fundamentals. These fundamental relationships should give a Christian the sense of love and security to reach out and work on their relationship with others in the church. In other words you always need to ensure that your fundamentals are well in place so that you have the foundation or platform to do more.

Unity in the church can be a minefield for any Christian. From the dominant western culture of the twentieth century, we have been raised to believe that our individuality, our individual rights and interests are of primary importance and this has often blurred the lines between what we think ought to be done, and what rightly needs to be done. The truth however is that we must all acknowledge the primacy of our Lord, whom God has exalted to the highest place. We must learn to bow and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. This in turn will guide us in our approach to the needs of the community and the place for individuals to grow and contribute their unique strengths, because then we are guided by his love for us.

It is when we get this right, when we align our principles and ideals with this truth that we can, as disparate individuals, unite to be like-minded, with one spirit and one mind. When we love and honour the one Lord, and we love each other in the humble and unselfish way he loves us, we will find the path that we can all take together as one.

In any endeavour to forge like-mindedness so that the church supports each other and works together, certain ideas, goals, even convictions, will have to give way. The agreed upon strategy, or vision, or priorities, or methodologies, may be successful or may not be. Those are not our primary concern; at some point we will have to come to a common understanding. There must be, however, no room for ego in our pursuit of the interests and glory of our Lord. But, especially for those who have to give way, we must know that it is God who brings the victory and not our carefully laid plans. Our love is for God, and our faith is in him—not our thoughts and ideas and plans.

When we humble ourselves, when we set aside selfish ambition and vain glory, when we value others above ourselves, when we look to the interests of others and are willing to even sacrifice our own, God sees, God knows, and God will respond to our sacrifice. Ultimately it is God who blesses our endeavour and gives us the victory. Glory be to God!

*“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.”*

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.