**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

[**JAMES 5:7-12**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%205&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 [JAMES 5:7-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%205&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. *“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”* At the beginning of this chapter, James had harsh words for the rich because they have used their wealth only for themselves and because of the way they exploit those in their power. It is likely that now James is addressing those on the other side of the divide—the poor—and he encourages them to be patient. What is James’ reasoning for these poor and afflicted Christians to be patient? Are they to be patient with respect to their circumstances (endure the suffering) or with respect to the relief from their suffering (help will come) or with respect to their faith (Christ will come and it will be worth it, so stay on the course)? Does this help you?
2. “*Don’t grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!”* Why would Christians speak against one another? Is it not that when resources are thin, when patience is thin, when we truly need to stand with each other, that we break down and break apart? And when this happens we are just one more step away from blaming God. Why do you think James is so harsh and strict, telling them that they will be judged when they do so?
3. *“Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”* Immediately after his harsh words come words of encouragement to persevere. Do you believe that there is merit to perseverance? What is the basis for our perseverance? “The Judge is standing at the door!” and “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy”: James tells us that both are equally true but who we meet rests on how we respond to our circumstances. Do you think this is right and true?
4. *“Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple “Yes” or “No.” Otherwise you will be condemned.”* This is not “swearing” as in using foul language, but rather “swearing” as in making vows that invite punishment if violated. From the flow of James 5:7-12, we have “be patient”, “don’t grumble against one another”, “persevere” and (above all) “don’t swear”. As the basis, we have “The Judge is standing at the door!” and “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy”. Why would Christians be tempted to swear in their state of poverty and suffering? And why is it so important that they not do so?
5. James in his letter had emphasised that our speech is not to be used lightly and taken lightly. Rather, we should speak to reflect the truth inside of us. And so even when our circumstances are dire and pressing, they are no excuse for us to let our guard down and compromise. Why is it so important to God that we are people of integrity who say what we mean and mean what we say?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**JAMES 5:13-18**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%205&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 [JAMES 5:13-18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%205&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. *“Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”* Reading this in the context of what we have been thinking about in the previous passage, we can see here James encouraging the Christians to do this instead of grumbling and making oaths. Clearly Christians are to live their lives (in good and in bad) as a community, thus helping one another to persevere until the Lord’s coming. Would you say that your church is the context where you find encouragement and where you give encouragement? What do you think can be done to strengthen and deepen the church’s role in this regard? Why is it that in certain matters the church elders should be involved?
2. *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”* What does James encourage us to do with respect to our spiritual needs? Why do you think he teaches that it is good to share with one another our spiritual needs? James here tells us that as Christians our prayers are as effective as Elijah’s prayers. Do you think so?
3. Do you think these are important aspects of our church life that can be well met by the care group? What other aspects of our church life that can be met in care groups? Do you think your care group meets these aspects of church life?

# Friday and Saturday

[**JAMES 5:19-20**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%205&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 [JAMES 5:19-20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James%205&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. *“My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”* Once again, in the context of Christians going through difficult times and suffering, some may “wander from the truth”. How can the church/care group be helping each other remain firm and faithful in the Lord? Why is it important to do so?
2. What can the church/care group/you do if someone has already left the church, or the faith, or is less and less involved in fellowship with the group and the church due to work pressure, financial difficulties, major illness or other problems? Would this also apply to helping a fellow disciple turn away from sin? What do you think will help these people to return?
3. Is there anyone that you need to pray for and bring to the attention of your group/church?

# Sunday

**PATIENCE IN THE FACE OF SUFFERING**

*“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”*

In pointing to how farmers have to wait for the land to yield its crop, James helps us to see that everything has its time. You cannot rush the fullness of time for a plant to yield its fruit. “You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near,” James says.

For many Christians, however, we are not waiting in plenty; many of us are waiting in suffering and pain. In fact, very often the people who are actively waiting are the people who are in need of relief. James tells us that those who suffer also are to exercise patience in the face of suffering. Even those who are known in Scripture to be God’s servants have suffered but James assures us that the Lord is “full of compassion and mercy.”

God has established the church for all Christians so that we are never alone in our suffering and pain. In the body there will be, at any one time, those who are in trouble, those who are happy, those who are sick, those who are in spiritual trouble. We are never alone and never to think that what we are going through is all that is in store for us. We can all share in joy and in suffering, in plenty and in want.

The church is full of people who can pray for us with the power and authority of Elijah because all of us are righteous in the sight of God because of the blood of our Lord. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective, James tells us.

Thus God, in his compassion and mercy, has not left us to our own devices while plying us with calls to be patient. The church is God’s vehicle of compassion and mercy and we should draw strength, comfort and help from it.

*“Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.”*

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.