**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

[**NEHEMIAH 1:1-11**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%201&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 [NEHEMIAH 1:1-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%201&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**

Roughly 70 years have passed since Israel was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and some Jews forced to live in exile in Babylon. The Persian empire under Cyrus had since taken over from the Babylonian empire.

1. *“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”* It is very likely that Nehemiah and others in his generation knew about Jerusalem and “home” from their parents. They probably would have grown up in exile. Why would Nehemiah weep and pray over the news he heard?
2. *“Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel.”* How does Nehemiah view the God he prays to? Why does he believe this of God when Israel is no more and Jerusalem is in ruins?
3. *“I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.”* Why does Nehemiah confess the sin of Israel and include himself and his family? Do you think this confession is just a part of his ritual in prayer or it is sincere? Is confession and seeking forgiveness a part of your own approach to God?
4. *“Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’”* What is the point that Nehemiah wants to bring to God’s attention?
5. *“Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”* What is Nehemiah’s plan?
6. Spend some time to think about what your faith, the “kingdom of God”, the church of Jesus Christ—as with a Jew and his nation, culture and faith—means to you. Would they cause you to weep and pray in sorrow (as did Nehemiah) or rejoice and praise? Or would the things/people who would move you deeply be exclusively people you love, such as your family?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**NEHEMIAH 2:1-9**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%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 [NEHEMIAH 2:1-9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%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. *In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”* Do you think this was planned? Do you think it was a good idea for Nehemiah to show his sadness to the king? What does he risk? Do you think it was natural for the king to ask about Nehemiah’s feelings?
2. *The king said to me, “What is it you want?”* The king knows, from Nehemiah’s reply, that he wants something from him. It would have been natural for him to be offended. What caused the king to be sympathetic?
3. *I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?”* Having been granted leave to go to Jerusalem to rebuild it, Nehemiah asked for things that he needed to accomplish his task. Clearly Nehemiah had already worked out the details of his plan. Again, it was a gamble because there was no telling how the king would respond. Why did Nehemiah decide to go all in and make his second request?
4. What do you think of Nehemiah’s approach to the whole matter, in terms of his relationship with God, his detailed planning and his approach to the king?
5. Would you say that God was behind everything, including inclining Nehemiah’s heart, or it was his deep identification as a Jew and his faith to test the waters as to the possibilities with the king, and that it was a case of the right man in the right place?

# Friday and Saturday

[**NEHEMIAH 2:10-20**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%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 [NEHEMIAH 2:10-20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%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. *“The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.”* Nehemiah went to Jerusalem and started to inspect the area and assess it. He kept his plans to himself and went about his inspections at night. What would the secrecy and cautiousness that Nehemiah adopted imply? Why didn’t Nehemiah just tell everybody (he didn’t even tell those who would be doing the work!) what he had in mind to do? What does this tell you about Nehemiah? At this point, who would Nehemiah be in the people’s eyes?
2. *Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.* From what Nehemiah shared with them, why would the Jews there agree to partner with Nehemiah?
3. *“But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us.”* A Horonite, an Ammonite official and an Arab revealed their opposition. Do you think this was why Nehemiah kept his cards close to his chest in the first place? How did Nehemiah respond? What do you think of what he said to them? What impresses you about Nehemiah and what can you learn from him about being involved in God’s work?

# Sunday

**I WAS CUPBEARER TO THE KING**

*“When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”*

Nehemiah was in a good position, serving the king. There was nothing to suggest that he was previously nationalistic and concerned with the fate of his home country and his people. There was no genealogy to suggest any pedigree. In all likelihood, at this point in time, the work of rebuilding the Temple, told in the early chapters of Ezra, had already stopped for many years. For some reason (or perhaps this was not the first time) Nehemiah asked about the developments in Jerusalem and upon hearing the sad state of affairs broke down in tears.

Nehemiah did not elaborate on his own journey to this point. What we know is that he cared so much about activities in a far-off homeland that he was willing to risk his position, and even possibly his life, to go there and manage them.

But before he undertook to speak to the king, he spent a great deal of time on his knees in prayer, seeking to heal Israel’s relationship with God, standing together with his people in repentance. He fortified his own faith by picking up the promises of God, burnishing the Jews’ credentials as God’s servants and people, whom God had redeemed time and time again.

He was not a recognised leader among the Jews. Neither was he a priest. There was no mention of him being a nobleman. It was unlikely that he was a rich man. Yet he volunteered to do God’s work because he cared enough to weep, to repent in solidarity, to draw close to God, to pray and plan, and to take calculated risks to advance his plans.

What do you think of Nehemiah’s example? Do we share the same concern for the work of God, the people of God, the church of God, that we would weep, pray, and volunteer ourselves to help? Would we spend that kind of effort on our knees and place our resources in God’s hands to use for his glory?

*“Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.”*

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.