**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

[**JEREMIAH 29:1-9**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah%2029&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 [JEREMIAH 29:1-9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah%2029&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**

This is likely the text that Daniel was reading in Daniel 9.

1. *“This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the skilled workers and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.)”* This tells us that the letter was written and sent after the Exile had occurred (see 2 Kings 24:8-17 for context). In other words, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple had already taken place. Why do you think it was necessary for Jeremiah to write such a letter? In whose name was it written?
2. *“ This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.”* Note the personal “I carried into exile”. What is God saying to the Jews at this point?
3. *“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”* Why is God saying this to the Jews? Isn’t the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile a punishment from God? Why did God decide to advise the Jews about their situation through Jeremiah? What would you, as an Exile, be hoping and praying for at this time? What would you be thinking about God and his relationship with Israel?
4. *Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,” declares the Lord.* Jeremiah doubles down and clearly says that this is the word of God and that others who say to the contrary were deceivers. What were the deceivers saying about God? What was Jeremiah saying about God? How can you tell, (especially with your heart clearly wanting one particular future), which message to believe?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**JEREMIAH 29:10-14**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah%2029&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 [JEREMIAH 29:10-14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah%2029&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. *“When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.”* What is the basis for Jeremiah’s prophecy that God will bring the Jews back to Jerusalem (read Isaiah 44-46 which was done in tawg-2023-week-18)?
2. *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* When God spoke of these plans, do they include the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile? How would you fit these acts of judgement—remember “all those I carried into exile”—into God’s assertion that he has the good of Israel in mind and heart? Do you think this picture of God—one who has plans for our good, for our hope and for our future—is for the Jews, or for larger groups such as “Christians in general”, or “the local church”, or can we claim it for ourselves as individuals? Do you think these plans include allowing painful episodes in judgement (consequence?) or as discipline (intent)? Do you think such a destiny is predicated on our good behaviour?
3. *“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you.”* This is possibly the part that prompted Daniel to pray and confess on behalf of his people. As you read what Jeremiah wrote (and God spoke), what do you think precedes the “then” in “Then you will call on me”? In other words, what had happened that in God’s mind was intended to lead the Jews to call on him? How then can you understand God's intentions in his acts of judgement and discipline? What does God want of us in seeking him?
4. *“I will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”* Note all the “I will” and the lack of “you must”. God only wants us to seek him truly, with all our heart and he will do everything else necessary to be found by us. Do you believe that this is the God whom you worship and obey?

# Friday and Saturday

[**JEREMIAH 29:15-32**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah%2029&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 [JEREMIAH 29:15-32](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah%2029&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. *You may say, “The Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon,” but this is what the Lord says about the king who sits on David’s throne and all the people who remain in this city, your fellow citizens who did not go with you into exile”* Who are those that the next prophecy was directed against and who are the “you”? *“Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty says: “I will send the sword, famine and plague against them and I will make them like figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten.”* What is the judgement on these people (not the “you”)? *“For they have not listened to my words,” declares the Lord, “words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either,” declares the Lord.* Why? And why were the “you” not included even though they too have not listened?
2. *“Therefore, hear the word of the Lord, all you exiles whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon.”* This follows from “You may say, ‘The Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon’”. In other words, “You may say that the prophets in Babylon are saying that those who did not go into Exile are the ones who are OK, but they will not escape my judgement just as you are undergoing my judgement. Now listen to what I have to say to you (remember how badly things have turned out when you did not listen).” Why, despite all their history and experience of God and being taught and shaped by the Law and having prophets who warned them time and again, why did they continue to sin and ignore God? Do you think they didn’t really know, or they know but choose to not take seriously, or they don’t really believe that God is real, or doing what God wants is too burdensome, or they prefer to live the life that their neighbours enjoy? Do you think because we are Christians we are different?
3. *“Therefore, hear the word of the Lord, all you exiles whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon.”* After judging them (both those who remained behind and those who went into Exile) for not listening (v19), why does God bother to ask them to “hear the word of the Lord”? And why does he promise that when they seek him with all their heart, and call on him and pray to him, he will listen to them (v12)?
4. Vv20-32: What does God tell the Exiles about his plans for those who were “prophesying lies to you in my name”? What else did God note about some of them? Why do these people falsely claim to speak for God? Why do they dare to do so?
5. Do you think in our time that God will judge those who speak falsely in God’s name to mislead people about him and his plans? Should this stop those of us who preach and teach?

# Sunday

**JUDGEMENT AND LOVE**

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

If God did not reveal himself and explain himself I very much doubt anyone would imagine him in this way. Yet when we understand it, it makes perfect sense.

As one of those listening to Jeremiah’s message from God, I would have asked, “why then did you allow Jerusalem and the Temple’s destruction? Why did you allow such upheaval and suffering to take place?”

In my mind, judgement and love are at odds. If there is judgement then there is no love; if there is love then judgement must be set aside. I cannot comprehend a God who thoroughly destroyed the fabric of my nation and community and then tells me with all sincerity that he knows what he is doing and that he continues to plan for my welfare and future. I cannot imagine that in all the destruction there was no malice; that love still remains. I cannot imagine that in judgement there is also love and in love judgement must exist as well.

God, through Jeremiah, made it clear that the judgement was his will (I banished you, I carried you into exile). The Jews needed to know that because they had been free and easy with their relationship with God, thinking that God would never allow the country that bore his name to be destroyed. God also assured them that his love and good intentions remained intact (“When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”). Therefore they should embrace God’s judgement and wait for his love to surface once again.

Modern Christianity very often pays lip service to judgement while emphasising God’s love and redemption. Such a god is only a god of our making, and not the God of the universe. Judgement without love would only lead to destruction. Love without judgement would only compromise God. Judgement with love brought us calvary.

The prosperity gospel, movements that emphasise power and claim to speak and act on behalf of God miss out the crucial element: God’s agenda and not ours. The bible leaves us in no doubt that God is locked in a battle to rid the world of sin: its agents, its influence and effects. Revelation does not glow with descriptions of how much healing and wealth and pleasure that exists ever since Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross. We all desire the power of God, but not for the purposes of God.

Through Jeremiah, God tells the Jews, “I am true to my word. My word is not mere whim and fancy, to be set aside whenever I so choose; it is truth on which the whole fabric of your existence is built. If you go against my word then you will suffer my wrath. At the same time I have chosen to love you and I am also true to that choice. My intentions for you as a people are for your welfare so that you have a hope and a future. Therefore listen to the truth that I tell you, and not the lies you wish to hear.”

The question is, who is the God that we would recognise, who is the God that we will find: The angry, wrathful God bent on punishing every wrong, the loving God who serves your every whim and fancy, or this wonderful God who is true—true to his word, true to his standards, true to his promises, true to his love—substantial, fascinating, thoroughly good, utterly dependable.

*“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares 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.