**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 5:1-19**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%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 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 5:1-19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%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. *Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.” Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.” Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.”* What new problem arose in the effort to rebuild the wall? What would you say was at the heart of this problem? Do you think such problems could ever hinder the work of the church today? Explain your thinking.
2. *“When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind …”* Do you think Nehemiah was right to be angry? What did he do to stop himself from acting thoughtlessly? Are you passionate when you see your brothers and sisters in the community suffering? Does your passion bring you to thoughtful action?
3. Look at vv6-13 to see how carefully but decisively Nehemiah dealt with the issue which had potential to cause disunity. What do you think of his approach? Do you think this is the right way, or is it better to deal with these matters privately?
4. *“In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.”* What do you think Nehemiah was trying to say in vv14-19? Was he boasting about himself? What was the point he was making?

# Wednesday and Thursday

[**NEHEMIAH 6:1-14**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%206&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 6:1-14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%206&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. *Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.”* Why wouldn’t Nehemiah meet with these people? Isn’t it good to build bridges and foster understanding to overcome the animosity? Do you think there is a place for such a refusal to talk?
2. *“Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter …”* At this point Sanballat’s hand was revealed, seeking to use slander to create conflict between Nehemiah and the king. How did Nehemiah respond? Do you agree with his actions? What was the basis of his confidence?
3. *One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, “Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you.” But I said, “Should a man like me run away? Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!” I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.* Finally Sanballat and Tobiah resorted to bribing a Jew (likely a temple official) to entrap Nehemiah. What saved Nehemiah from making a serious mistake and being subject to all sorts of false accusations?
4. *They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.” But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.”* This is “psychological warfare”, seeking to undermine by getting into Nehemiah’s (and the Jews’) head with false pretences, fears, slander, threats and entrapment. How did Nehemiah remain steadfast in all this?

# Friday and Saturday

[**NEHEMIAH 6:15-19**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%206&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 6:15-19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah%206&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 the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.”* When you have the time, read again Nehemiah 1-6. Jerusalem was in ruins for many years but the wall was rebuilt in 52 days. What do you think are the key points underlying this achievement?
2. *“When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.”* The tone and reach of Nehemiah’s conclusion is universal, speaking of enemies and surroundings, because he is praising his God, who has accomplished the impossible, but the intended audience is likely the Jews themselves, for them to realise that with God on their side the enemy will always fail. As you have journeyed with Nehemiah in this task that he had set out to do, do you gain the same confidence about your God that he did?
3. *“Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shekaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.”* The immediate reality, however, is that enemies remain, within and without, and Nehemiah and the Jews can expect more opposition and problems. Do you think this diminishes Nehemiah’s confidence and claim about God? Do you think this is still true today, in the work of the church?

# Sunday

##### ENEMIES WITHIN AND WITHOUT

*“When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.”*

Sometimes the most discouraging truth is when you discover that it is your own people that are causing the problems. “As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!” When put in these terms it is clear that these “nobles and officials” were betraying their people and profiting from it.

Enemies within usually are not so obvious. They will have some reason to let others do the hard work but they will be there to gain the credit and the fruit. They are quick to run down other people’s ideas but do not have any proposals of their own. They are bold enough to threaten when things do not turn out the way they want, either by leaving or withdrawing their support, and they enjoy exercising authority over others. When it comes to expenditure, the church always cannot afford it but their lifestyle says otherwise.

It is interesting that Nehemiah became angry, not discouraged. This is the better response when you come across what is wrong. When you know right is on your side, you can get angry and let your passion move you to confront the wrong. When you get discouraged you are pulled inwards; you lose strength and momentum and are tempted to give up.

It is also interesting that Nehemiah chose to ignore enemies without as much as he could but dealt decisively and quickly with the enemies within.

When there were threats of violence, Nehemiah took practical steps to keep people safe. When people were exhausted and discouraged, Nehemiah adapted his strategy so people could get the rest they needed. But when the enemies were just throwing words and trying to make themselves more important than they actually were, Nehemiah ignored them and focused his mind and heart on God. He respected the enemy’s threats but he did not allow them space in his mind and heart.

Above all, God was the one Nehemiah was mindful of at all times.

*“But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall.”*

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.