



**COLLEGE HEIGHTS
BAPTIST CHURCH**

The Christian Life: Part I

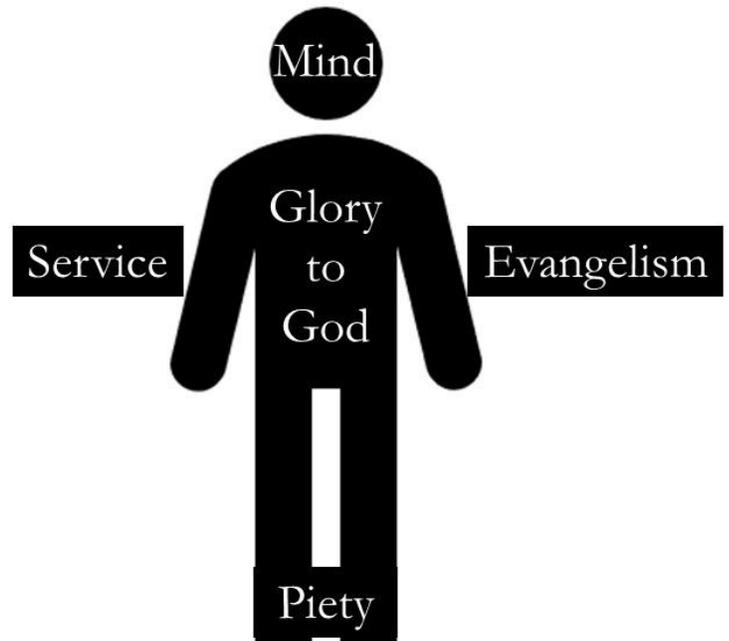
Daily Scripture Readings for
January 4-31

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

What does it mean to live a Christian Life? This will be the question at the forefront of our minds at the beginning of this year. In the summer of last year, I introduced you to a guy who looked like this: we bring glory to God through our minds (thinking about God), piety (following God's Law), service (helping others as if they are God), and evangelism (telling others about God).

We will use this guy as a visual for how we are to live the Christian life. Every week, we will learn about a topic that is important in our lives and culture, and we will consider how we can bring glory

to God within that topic. Without further ado, let's begin talking about our first topic: truth.



WEEK 1: THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND TRUTH

Monday, January 4 - John 18:33-38; John 8:31-32

What is truth? It's a question that we think is only relevant to our day and age, but it was the question that Pilate wondered 2000 years ago as well. When Pilate asks this question in John 18:38, he brings his sentencing of Jesus into perspective. For Pilate, Rome, and the Jewish Sanhedrin, the truth of who Jesus was irrelevant. The truth would be crafted in whatever way would fit what the officials wanted to do. The Sanhedrin wanted Jesus executed, so they made Jesus seem as dangerous as possible before Pilate. Pilate wanted to appease the crowd in order not to incite a riot, so he followed their wishes. When Pilate asks "what is truth?," he is not interested in knowing the truth, he is making a statement that truth is relative.

What Jesus says immediately previous to Pilate's question is that his life was to be a witness to the truth. Jesus already said similar words to his disciples in John 8:31-32: following the teachings of Jesus allows us to know the truth. This truth allows us freedom. If we belong to this truth, if we hold on to this truth, we are listening to the voice of our good God.

We live in a world today where it seems half of people ask Pilate's question in the same way he does and the other half ask the question because they truly do not know what to believe. We live in a society where we not only disagree about opinions on a subject, but we disagree about the foundational facts. How can we possibly know the truth? This is how: the truth is not relative. It is built upon the teachings of the Bible. We are to bring glory to God through our minds and part of glorifying God means using our brains to sift through the lies and learn the truth. Part of the Christian life is to bring glory to God by advocating for the truth and standing for truth. Hold to the teachings of Jesus; tell the truth, and support others who tell the truth.

Tuesday, January 5 - John 14:15-17; 15:26-27

John has a lot to say regarding truth. Truth is one of the major themes and this starts in John 1:14: "and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." Truth comes through Jesus. When Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death, resurrection, and ascension, he says the words which are our Scripture Reading today. We are not on our own when discerning between fact and fiction; the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit, is with us to help us and advocate for us. The Holy Spirit helps us to know the truth. Then, we testify concerning the truth to the world.

Christians must be cautious when discerning the truth. We must be sure that we are listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit and not just our own thoughts. Too often, you hear of someone saying "God told me _____" or "God wants you to know _____" (this second one is always my favorite because you'd think God would have told me that too). If what "God is telling you" is not grounded in reality, then you may

want to spend a little more time in prayer discerning what God is really saying. Do not confuse the Spirit of truth with what you want to be true. Do not confuse the Spirit of truth with your preconceived ideas. Do not fit the facts to your already formed opinion. Listen to the Spirit of truth which lives within you.

Wednesday, January 6 - Romans 1:1-17

Tonight, we will begin a study of Romans. The Sunday Morning Bible Study quarterly last Spring was Romans, but we did not get to study that together due to the Pandemic. The passage we will study tonight ends with the theme of the letter. In verses 16-17, the major themes of God's power, salvation, faith, and God's righteousness are all mentioned. The beginning of verse 16 tells us that Paul is not ashamed of the gospel, and his life surely shows that to be true.

What about you? Are you ashamed of the gospel? Do you tell the story of the gospel whenever you get the chance? Let's dive into Romans tonight and start reading this wonderful letter which many consider Paul's theological resumé.

Thursday, January 7 - Jeremiah 28:1-17

If there is a certain group of people I have a strong disdain for, it is false prophets. There are false prophets today much like the false prophets Jeremiah dealt with during his life. These are the people who tell people what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear. These are the people who dare call themselves pastors, but all they care about is fame and fortune for themselves. These are the people who tell their congregations "God told him that he needs a private jet to us for ministry, so the church should buy it" (yes, this really happened).

Hananiah told the people of Judah that "God told him" that God had saved the people from Babylon and within two years all of the exiles and Temple treasures would be returned. This is what the people wanted to hear; however, this was not a message from God. Hananiah was punished by God for leading the people of God astray.

How do we know if what a person is saying is true prophecy or false prophecy? That is a hard decision to make, but luckily we have the Spirit of truth residing in us. Deuteronomy 18:22 only tells us that if a prophet's words come true, they are from God. If they do not, they are not from God. Certainly can be helpful when looking in hindsight, but not helpful in the moment.

One way we can discern ultimate truth is by looking to the Bible. Does what this person says match with the totality of Scripture? Is this prophecy contradictory to the words of God in the Bible? If their words match with the Word of God, then it is more likely to be true. If what a person says does not match with the Bible, their words should not be taken seriously. Pray for guidance to know whose words to accept as true and whose words to not believe.

Friday, January 8 - Matthew 7:15-23

The inner life of a person is going to show them to be authentic or a fraud. That's the message Jesus is telling his audience during this section of the Sermon on the Mount. The truth of the matter is that there are people in churches today who are not Christians. Everyone around them thinks they are Christians, but they have not truly given their hearts to Jesus. We will know these people by the fruit of their life. Not necessarily their outward action, but if they exhibit the fruit of the Spirit as Paul describes in Galatians 5:22-23.

Knowing the truth about yourself is vital. Have you given your all to Christ? When discussing the Christian life, let us remember that the most important part of this life is accepting Jesus' sacrifice. It is not primarily about our actions nor our words; the Christian life is about humbling ourselves and submitting to our Master and Lord. Today's devotion is about being honest with yourself. Is your inner life a life that bears good fruit? What is the truth concerning your life?

Saturday, January 9 - 2 Peter 2:1-3

Greed is the word which jumps off the page to me in 2 Peter 2:3. The Christian life and money will be discussed in a couple weeks, but it is our greed for power, wealth, and prestige which leads people to lie. Lying is what false prophecy is; lies are the opposite of truth. It's one of the Ten Commandments not to lie. And yet it seems like we lie all the time to make ourselves look better than we are. We want people to like us, so we tell them what they want to hear. We want the perks of being popular, so we craft our stories to fit the opinions of the audience.

There have always been false prophets, and, until Jesus returns, there always will be. There will be people who bend the truth or tell outright lies because they are greedy. Don't be those people. Don't listen to those wolves in sheep's clothing, to borrow a phrase from yesterday's reading. As we close this week on truth, let me encourage you to not participate in the greed of others. Do not give them the fame they seek. Do not give them the money they want. Stand up to these false prophets and stand for the truth.

Sunday, January 10 - Psalm 77:11-20

WEEK 2: THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND LIFE

Monday, January 11 - John 3:16, 31-36

This coming Sunday is Sanctity of Life Sunday. This is the Sunday that many evangelical churches and anti-abortion groups bring attention to the *Roe v. Wade* decision made in 1973. Leading up to Sunday, we will be reading different passages of Scripture about what it means to choose life.

As Christians, we value life. We serve a God who values our lives so much that he sent his Son to die for our sin. As fallen human beings, all of humanity is destined to die. Choosing Jesus to be your Savior and Lord is the only way to choose life eternal. This week is all about being pro-life. Not pro-life as it is a hot button political word, but

pro-life in the way Jesus is pro-life. What does that mean? It means exactly what our passages today say: if you have faith in Jesus, you have life; if you don't have faith in Jesus, you do not have life.

It is likely if you are reading this, you have life as described in John 3. What about your friends? What about your neighbors? Do they know about this life? Who are you going to tell about eternal life today?

Tuesday, January 12 - John 8:3-11

Death was the punishment for the woman caught in adultery; Deuteronomy 22:22-23 prescribes this punishment. According to Old Testament law, the case is very cut and dry; the woman is guilty and should be executed. Yet, when Jesus is asked about the punishment, he does not condemn her to death. He explains to the crowd that if you haven't sinned, go ahead and kill her for her sin. Jesus does not condone the action, but he does pardon the woman only telling her to "not sin again."

What can this passage mean for us as we explore the topic of the sanctity of life? I think it means we should not be quick to condemn other people for their actions. I think it means we choose to support life for people, even those who are guilty, over death. We don't support people doing whatever they want and never changing their life; however, we should support giving people second chances. We support rehabilitation, not retribution.

We value everybody's life because God values everybody's life. From the worst criminal to an innocent child, Jesus died for all of them. Let us support life like Jesus.

Wednesday, January 13 - Romans 1:18-3:20

As we jump into the body of the Letter to the Romans, the theme of these verses is judgment. The conclusions, starting in 3:9 is that all are guilty, Jew and Gentile alike. Whether you grew up in church or never entered a church, everyone is under the power of sin. To paraphrase Romans 2:25, there is value in growing up in church because you know the way God wants you to act. However, if you do not do as the

Lord requires, you are no better off than the one who does not go to church. This is the judgment that is upon us all. Let's discuss the Judge and his judgment more tonight.

Thursday, January 14 - Exodus 32:7-14

God was angry at the Israelites for building and worshipping the golden calf; God was angry enough that God wanted Moses to leave him alone so that God could kill the Israelites. Moses intercedes for Israel and God relents in his anger. At the end of the story, God does send a plague on the people and some do die because of their disobedience (Exodus 32:35), but all of Israel is not consumed as God originally desired.

Valuing life means interceding through prayer on the behalf of others. Moses intercedes for the people of Israel and God listens to Moses' request. When we pray for others, we are valuing their life and well-being. What do you think about when you pray? Do you believe that God is listening? Do you believe that there is power in your prayers? I cannot stress how important prayer is; God is listening to you and the path of life can alter because of your prayers. Today, I want you to pray, pray, pray for those in our church family and community who are sick. Pray for their well-being. Pray for those who have fallen away from the body of Christ; pray that they return to a healthy relationship with God. Pray for those who have never confessed faith in Jesus Christ; pray that they would make that step of faith, and God gives them more time in life to make that decision. Praying for others is the best way to value others' life. Pray as Moses did for Israel; pray for the people you know today.

Friday, January 15 - Philemon

For the 21st century reader, Philemon is difficult. It is a story of Paul sending a runaway slave back to his master. It does not condone slavery as we would like it to. Sadly, this short letter was used in the past as a way to justify slavery. So what can the Letter to Philemon tell us about valuing life?

When Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon, he asks that Onesimus be treated as a brother. Paul asks that any debt that Onesimus owes be put on Paul's tab. To value life means to take upon yourself the debts of other people. It means to forgive other people's debts. What debts are you willing to take on? What debts are you willing to forgive? Jesus valued your life so much that he took your debts upon himself. Are you willing to do the same for others?

Saturday, January 16 - Deuteronomy 5:17

Seems simple enough: do not murder. Most English versions of the Bible translate Deuteronomy 5:17 in this way; however, literally the Hebrew says do not kill. Our English translations have done some of the interpretation of the commandment for us: the sixth commandment of the ten is not about complete pacifism, but it is about the intent to kill somebody else. It is obvious that valuing life means not supporting the murder of people. What is less obvious is what is murder? Is it murder to kill during war? Is it murder to sentence someone to the death penalty? Is it murder to refuse life-saving medical care? These are all very difficult ethical questions, which we cannot possibly answer in a short devotion today.

What we can emphasize, though, is the importance of valuing life. Valuing all life should be the start of our ethical discussions. We should not be looking for justification to kill others, but always err on the side of saving people. Jesus valued our lives to the point that he died for them. How much do you value the life of others? How much do their lives matter to you?

Sunday, January 17 - Psalm 78:12-16

WEEK 3: THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND MONEY

Monday, January 18 - Acts 4:32-5:11

We see the importance of sharing with one another and honesty about our giving in this passage. We have a tale of two families: Barnabus and Ananias and Sapphira. The early church was in the practice of sharing all of their resources. If somebody had a need, another member of the church provided. As such, “there was no need among them” (Acts 4:34).

Barnabus sold a field to give to the apostles in this way; Ananias and Sapphira also sold a piece of property, but lied about how much of the proceeds they were giving. Our gifts to God are not about the quantity of the gift, but the heart with which it is given. To bring glory to God with our money, our hearts must be right. When living the Christian Life, the righteous life does not begin with our actions; it begins with our hearts.

A church will fail 100% of the time if it *requires* the type of giving seen in Acts 4 by its members. The sharing with one another seen in Acts 4:32 was not a new law that the Apostles had given; it was *the will* of the church members to take care of one another. People gave freely to one another because they knew if they had need later, someone else would help them.

Do you feel that freedom to give? Do you believe that you can give now to those in need and not guard your money because if you have need in the future, you trust someone will take care of you? What is preventing you from having that belief? As a church, we must take care of one another. Pray that you can have a heart for giving this year. Pray that you can do your part in making sure there is no need among us.

Tuesday, January 19 - Proverbs 22:1-2, 16

There is no rich or poor in the Kingdom of God; we are all equal in the eyes of God. Given this, let us not judge ourselves by the size of our bank account or yearly salary; let us, instead, judge ourselves as God does: are you a good person? What is

in your heart when you give to others? Do you give so that others see you give or do you give because God has told you to give? Do you give in order to find favor with people or do you give in order to follow God's commands?

Proverbs 22:16 is even more convicting than the first two verses. I want to tell you a story; not to pat myself on the back but to provide an example. I was on the coffee aisle a few months ago and was perplexed at the prices. The giant containers of the name brand and generic brand coffees, which are the cheapest and what I had always bought, were much cheaper than smaller bags of coffee. Not cheaper in the sense that buying in bulk is always better, but so much cheaper that something didn't seem right. I decided to buy a smaller, more expensive bag of coffee which said it was farmed by individual farmers in South America and bought at a fair price. I decided to start reading more about the coffee industry and farms throughout the world in order to be a more knowledgeable consumer and to live a life which is more in-line with Proverbs 22:16.

I don't have grand ideas that I will change the world by my buying habits, but that is not my goal; my goal is to live a godly life and to have a godly heart. This includes what I do as a consumer and with my money. I am undoubtedly a hypocrite because there are so many other areas of consumerism where I am cheating poor workers out of a livable wage, but I am working to educate myself and do better. Living a Christian Life as it relates to money does not mean always finding the cheapest price, but it means paying a fair price. A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches; oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself, and giving to the rich, will only lead to loss.

Wednesday, January 20 - Romans 3:21-4:25

We continue in Romans tonight by looking at this section of Romans 3-4. This section is the main idea of the first part of Paul's letter. We are justified not by works but by faith; we are made righteous because of God's righteousness. In fact, when Martin Luther wrote a commentary on Romans, he called Romans 3:21-26 "the chief

point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible.” Romans 3:27-4:25 then furthers this main idea by using examples from the life of Abraham. This is an important passage of Romans and one that I look forward to discussing with you tonight.

Thursday, January 21 - Proverbs 11:15

One of the things that I enjoy about the Bible is that it is not conservative or liberal: it's the Bible and it's all God's truth. On Monday, we read a passage of Scripture that if they were applied outside the context of church, it would be considered part of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Today, we read a passage which is conservative and would be found within fiscal policies of Republicans: it is safer to save your money and refuse to loan money to strangers.

It is extremely important to be smart with the money that God has given us. The start of a healthy theology of money is understanding the last half of the previous sentence. The money you have and the possessions you own ultimately come from God. In fact, a healthy theology of money means realizing that you do not own anything, but God allows you to steward his riches. You may have worked tirelessly in order to achieve the life you have; however, all resources of this earth belong to God. As such, it is necessary to be good stewards of what God has given us and not be frivolous with money.

The Bible does not support one economic policy. What the Bible does is teach us how to live in a healthy relationship with money, no matter the economic policies of the society in which we live. Bringing glory to God with our money cannot be resolved by reading only one verse. We cannot use proof-texts concerning money or any aspect of the Christian Life in order to further what we decided without consulting the Bible. What this means is that we embrace the truth of a passage like today as well as a passage as we read earlier in the week. We realize the importance of saving while at the same time understanding the importance of being a cheerful giver. Doing both is how we bring glory to God with our money.

Friday, January 22 - Matthew 6:1-4

There is an assumption in this passage; do you see it? “When you give...” assumes that this is an action the listeners are already doing. It is an action that needs correction, as Jesus gives here, but it is an action which was already a habit.

Since it is the beginning of the year, it is a good time to reevaluate your finances and your giving habits. Have you been giving to the church and other charitable organizations as God has led you? Are there changes in your lifestyle that need to be made to do as Jesus is assuming his listeners are doing?

Once one gets to where the habit of giving is part of life, then bringing glory to God with our money is following the pattern Jesus describes in Matthew 6:2-4. Jesus commands us to not give so that people can know how virtuous we are; our giving is to be done in secret. Jesus uses hyperbole in verse 3 to describe how secretive our giving should be. Obviously, hands do not have minds of their own, but that is to the degree the Christian life is not about practicing your piety so that others can see. We are to walk in the Christian life for our Father in heaven to see, not for others to notice.

Saturday, January 23 - Luke 16:1-15

Scholars are divided on the meaning of this parable. First of all, it's peculiar that Jesus seems to be supporting dishonesty and cheating a boss out of money. Some interpret this parable in order to explain living a shrewd lifestyle. I think using this parable as a reason to live this type of life is missing the forest for the trees; it's ignoring the other Bible passages about money to find an interpretation which supports what you want to do.

The point of the parable is expressed in verses 11-13. Our true riches are found in eternal life; our true boss is God. Do not rely on the riches of this earth, but rely on the riches of God. Focus on eternity, not the present. This conclusion did not please the Pharisees who were listening. They were told they could not love God and money, and, as verse 14 says, they loved money. Jesus speaks straight to their hearts. In a

sense, Jesus is telling them they are committing idolatry; the gravest of offenses for Pharisees.

As we conclude this week talking about the Christian life and money, where is your heart? Do you worry about money or do you trust in God? You don't have to have money to worship money. In fact, concern about lack of money can make money your god just as much as being rich. Pray for God to guide your thoughts about money. Pray that the money God has allowed you to have is used for the glory of God. Do not let your possessions possess you. You cannot serve two masters; choose this day whom you will serve.

Sunday, January 24 - Psalm 79:8-10

WEEK 4: THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORK

Monday, January 25 - Proverbs 6:6-11; 10:4

How should Christians work? There are several facets of this question which we will discuss this week. Today, we read in the Proverbs about a Christian work ethic. Proverbs 6 uses the ant as an analogy. Does the ant have someone telling them what to do every moment of the day? Without a governor, a boss, do they still complete the task they must? As Christians, we should work hard no matter who is watching. There is a warning here as well. When we are lazy, we face poverty. This isn't a statement that all people in poverty are lazy, but it is a saying which shows if we are lazy we risk not supplying for ourselves or family. Proverbs 10:4 reemphasizes this truth.

How diligent are you in your work? We bring glory to God when we work as if we are working for God when we are working for humans (Colossians 3:23). Having a good work ethic is an example of pious living. Pray today that God will strengthen you in the work you have. Pray that you can see yourself as working for God and not for people. Pray that you can have the strength to work like the ant with no one watching you, yet doing what God needs you to do for His world today.

Tuesday, January 26 - Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

When I was in high school band, one of the abilities we constantly practiced was being in tune. A band will not sound good if it is not in tune even if every musician plays the right notes. We worked together to accomplish this goal of being in tune. None of the individual members of the band could accomplish this task on his/her own. In my opinion, one of the most beautiful parts of music is when the group is in tune. There is a sound which echoes off of the concert hall or auditorium that makes a 50 person band sound like a 100 person band when it is in tune. A band in tune can do far more when they work together than when they are individually focused.

You are not alone. In the Christian life, we work together to accomplish the goals which God has set before us. There are no “lone ranger” Christians. How much more we can do together than alone! And then there is God. Ecclesiastes 4 says that two are better than one and then says “a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” You are not alone. You have help in your work from your fellow workers and you have heavenly help from a Father who knows how to give good gifts to his children (Matthew 7:11). Rely on God and rely on your fellow Christians to accomplish far more together than you can alone.

Wednesday, January 27 - Romans 5:1-21

Romans 5 starts the second section of the letter and discusses the important topic of the hope we have in our glorification with Jesus. It moves from the justification we discussed last week to the reconciliation we receive and ultimate salvation. Justification, reconciliation, and salvation have nothing to do with what we can accomplish but everything to do with what Jesus has already accomplished. The grace of God is stronger than the sin of Adam! Praise be to God!

Thursday, January 28 - Ecclesiastes 4:6

Work smart, not hard. I believe that is the summary of Ecclesiastes 4:6. Quiet is better than toil. Quiet is better than chasing after wind. One handful is enough if two handfuls cause consternation. Work smart, not hard.

This principle is something I have focused on in my life over the past few months. It stemmed from one of my classes last semester which focused on personal development. I was given the task to develop four overarching principles for my life. Through prayer and meditation, I decided upon: work smart, play smart, live smart, and learn smart. I do not want to be working hard. I want to be working smart. Working hard to me means that you are not trusting God to take work with you. Working hard means taking control of your life. Working smart, however, allows God to use your time for his glory. Working smart means balancing your life between work/family/rest/play. Working smart helps you realize that one handful and quiet is better than two handfuls and anxiety. Work smart and trust in God.

Some of us think that we need to work ourselves to the bone in order to please God. I don't think that is God's desire at all. In fact, work was part of God's original design before the fall of man. Work only became difficult when sin entered the world. Work is part of who we are with God, and so is resting in God's love. God requires a balance. Work smart, not hard.

Friday, January 29 - Luke 15:25-32

The parable of the lost sons. I've become convinced that this should be the name of the parable which we read the end of today. The son who has been working for his father as a slave is just as lost as the son who wasted his inheritance. It doesn't matter if you've worked all your life for God or you ran away from God with this vice or that, you are just as lost if you haven't joined the party as the parable says. If you are outside trying to work for our salvation, you haven't accepted the gift of the Father.

You cannot work yourself into heaven. It doesn't matter how much you have given to the church, nor does it matter how many service projects you have done. It

doesn't matter if you've followed the Ten Commandments all of your life, nor does it matter if you've been at church three times a week your whole life. If you have not given your heart to Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, you are not saved. You will not go to heaven when your body dies.

Who do you know who needs to hear this message today? Who is a lost son who is working for the father in hopes of earning their salvation and hasn't gone into the party? Who needs to accept the gift of the Father instead of trying to earn the prize set before them?

Saturday, January 30 - Nehemiah 4:1-23

This passage in Nehemiah exemplifies why it is important to have a good work ethic and prayer together. We bring glory to God through our hard work, but the hard work must have a foundation of prayer. Nehemiah and the returned exiles faced a tough task of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. So they prayed, protected themselves, and kept working.

This is the way all of us should go about our work. When we face opposition or when we just do not know the next step, we pray to seek the answers from God and we keep going. Much like we discussed on Tuesday from Ecclesiastes, when we work together we are better than if we work alone. When we work together and with God, we can accomplish far more than what could be done with only human hands. Work with others and work with God today!

Sunday, January 31 - Psalm 80:3