

What's Next?

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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This morning I want to encourage you to take a copy of God's word and open to the book of Nehemiah. Today we're gonna be in chapters 4 through 6 of the book of Nehemiah. I know for some of your families you have one copy of Scripture for the entirety of the family and we're gonna be in several passages over the course of these three chapters. You may want to pass the Bible around the table, or many of your families you have one copy per person, however you find yourself this morning, thank you in advance for grabbing a copy of God's word and opening to Nehemiah 4.

As you're finding those passages, there is a phrase that I've utilized in recent days and I don't know if I coined it or not and so I want to apologize to whomever said this first if I somehow have plagiarized you, but it is the issue or the designation between the church gathered versus the church scattered. Allow me to illustrate. For the majority of us, and I realize there are those of you that are part of our service today that in these recent two months you have been a part of our church or any church for the first time in maybe a long time or forever, or for the first time in your life at all, but for the majority of us, we can remember back nine weeks ago, we can remember what it was like to gather as a body of believers, to gather as a church. At least from my life, the overwhelming majority of my life has been the church gathered. In other words, whether it was a Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday, a midweek Bible study, a committee meeting, whatever it was, the overwhelming majority of the spiritual formation in my life took place among other believers and typically on a campus where many people had gathered. And what would we do on Sunday or, shall I say, really on Monday, we would go and scatter out into the community, various schools, occupations, neighborhoods, whatever they may be, until we gathered again. Now we find ourselves the church scattered. We're not in the room such as where I am today, in fact, it's empty as it has been these last 2+ months, and everybody's beginning to wonder what it's going to look like when the church becomes gathered again. It's kind of interesting, isn't it? We never imagined being scattered, now we're starting to process what will it look like when we are gathered.

You know, as we went through this Bible reading plan as a family of faith and for those of you that are new to us, please jump onboard with us. We're walking through Scripture typically one chapter a day over a course of about three years. I never dreamed how providential that it would be in our lives. Now I know providential is one of those big

Bible words which really just means that God is up to something in the background that we may not be able to see with our own eyes at the time. We never dreamed that when we laid out the Bible reading plan that we'd be walking through a global pandemic, and you know it's interesting to me that there could not be a more fitting passage or chapters or book of the Bible to be reading right now than Ezra and Nehemiah. Obviously last week we focused on Ezra, this week we've been in Nehemiah, we'll discover in a moment they were contemporaries with this single purpose, this is what is amazing to me: the Jewish people had been scattered in Babylon for 70 years and now they're in the process of regathering themselves. They had gotten formal permission by Cyrus who was over the Medes and the Persians to go back home. They have laid out the blueprint for the building of the temple, the walls and the city. They've established their banking system, they've established their hospital, they are beginning the process – this is amazing to me – of rebooting, rebuilding or reestablishing not just their secular community but their faith-based community, that temple worship that Ezra will play such a critical part in, and yet today we're in the process of rebuilding our economy, rebuilding our communities and, yes, we're even in discussion of how do we regather as the body of Christ, how do we come back in a large gathering and the percentages that might or might not be involved, the activities that will or will not take place and those are details that we'll talk about later, but what I want to focus on today is what's next? In other words, when we get to Nehemiah 4, the process has begun to rebuild their community, rebuild their place of worshiping the Lord, and what we're about to see in chapters 4 through 6 is what they experience as they walk through this journey.

Now I'm gonna go ahead and share with you in advance it's going to seem somewhat negative this morning because we're gonna deal with five ways of opposition or five criticisms that the Israelite people underwent in this process of reestablishing themselves but we're also gonna see how the people of God responded. You and I cannot stop the criticisms, we cannot stop the opposition. What's important for us today is that we respond appropriately like Nehemiah and like the people of God did back in his day. So hopefully you have a copy of God's word with you, we're gonna begin in Nehemiah 4 and we're gonna deal with these things that I believe are next on the agenda of life. They walked through them as they reestablished themselves, I believe we're gonna walk through them as well. Now let me go ahead and qualify it. It may not happen successively, it may happen all at the same time for all I know, it may happen completely out of order, but I think you're gonna see in just a moment that what they experienced as they reopened themselves, their culture, their society and their "church," I bet we're gonna walk through the same path ourselves.

Beginning in chapter 4, verse 1 it says,

1 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. 2 And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him,

and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

The first opposition or criticism that we see is mockery. They were rebutting them and they're basically saying there's no way you can pull this off. It doesn't matter how you try to approach it, it doesn't matter what means by which you get creative, you cannot pull it off. Here's the thing I find interesting about all of the questions that are asked. These Jews that are feeble, can they pull this off? And by the way, I love the one about the fox. You know, can a fox even go upon the wall? Surely not, it will fall down. You notice that every single question that is asked regarding the reestablishment of the wall is an opinion and not a fact. In other words, the facts were they had the stones. The facts were they had people who had the skill-set to do so, they were questioning whether or not it should actually take place.

You know, you and I today as we walk through a global pandemic, one of the things that I have noticed is that we as a culture on many issues are becoming even more polarized, and here's what I mean by that: the difference between the data that we receive and, shall we say, the affirmation that it brings to our life. Let me unpack that for just a moment. You can have two individuals today have two completely different opinions. Let me just use the illustrations of a global pandemic. We should open up, we should not open up. Pretty cut and dry, right? We can get a certain set of data, certain number of people that have been hospitalized, certain percentage of the population, and those who believe that we should not open up see those numbers as affirming their position, those who believe that we should open up see the same set of numbers affirming their position. Why is that critical to understand? Because as we begin the process of opening up our culture, as we begin the process as a body of believers of gathering together again in the days ahead, there is no amount of data, information, studies or research that will change people's mind. They already have it established. These individuals, these Samaritans, these individuals who were contrary to the people of God, it didn't matter if they were certified, if they had all the paperwork, all the credentials and all the degrees, they didn't believe they should be allowed to do it so therefore all of the data supported their presupposition and the Jewish people had the same issue, that all the data supported their position.

So this mockery or this ridicule as you and I as the people of faith, as we begin the process slowly and steadily of evaluating how do we regather, how do we do ministry in a certain context at least with large numbers of people, it doesn't matter what the data is, it doesn't matter what the facts are, those people, those individuals who do not want us to gather will find that the data supports their position and those of us who want to gather will discover that, you guessed it, the data will support our position. So how do we respond? I love what it says down here in verse 6,

6 So we built the wall.

Isn't that a great response? They built the wall. In other words, we the church, and I use that word collectively, we've got to keep being the church. Now I shared at the beginning of our service today the differentiation between information and communication. Even as

we go through this global pandemic, we're still seeing people saved, we're still seeing people baptized, we're still seeing benevolence needs met. I tell you, we're still doing weddings though they may not be as attended in the past and they may utilize technology. We're still celebrating people's lives at what we call a memorial or a funeral. We're still meeting with individuals. We're still counseling. We're still having Bible studies and Sunday school. We're just doing it a little bit different. And so the thing I want to make very clear this morning is even if it looks different, even if it's through a different means of communication, we the people of God cannot cease being the church.

Now I've heard people say, "Well, you know, the book of Hebrews it says we shall not forsake the gathering of believers." Well, I agree to that to an extent but we're gathered with more people online than we ever were in person and so that being said, as we begin this process like the Israelites of reestablishing themselves, as we do so there are going to be people who use the same data, the same statistics and the same research to say, "Oh, we shouldn't or they shouldn't or there's no way this should ever happen," but what should we the body of faith say? Verse 6, we've got to be the church. We haven't stopped preaching. We haven't stopped singing. We haven't stopped baptizing. We haven't stopped helping. We've just been doing it in a different way. We have to be the church.

Now the second aspect or the second issue that comes up in their lives and this is one of those words that kind of gets us a little sideways at times is we discover that there was a conspiracy. Now I didn't say a conspiracy theory, I didn't say some of these wild ideas that are out there that people like to hang their hat on, a conspiracy by definition is just really a coalition of individuals with a common goal, and what we discover is in verse 7 that Tobias and Sanballat gather a whole other group of people and they decide to, shall we say, increase the rhetoric, increase the volume of their opposition to the Israelites rebuilding their city, their wall and their temple. When you get to verse 8, it says,

8 And [they] conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. 9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

In other words, as we begin the process of reestablishing the church gathered, there will be those that ridicule and mock and when they see that we, the church, have got to be the church, they will bring in others with them and the volume will get louder and they'll bring experts from here and researchers from there, and they will begin to conspire and the thing that I want to communicate very clearly this morning is this: that there are no means that you and I can ever gather together to somehow, some way out-duel them. In other words, if they have five lawyers and we get five lawyers, they'll just get a sixth. If they get five experts, we get five experts, they'll just grab a sixth. In fact, one of the things I want you to know is that as the people of God whether the Israelites in the Old Testament, the believers in the New Testament, or you and I today, we can never out-duel the world. They will always find a way to have one other resource, one other means or one other perspective, but I want you to see how the people of God responded. Notice what it says in verse 9, "Nevertheless we made our prayer." You see, the world at large can lawyer up, they can research up, they can do everything they desire to do, but you

and I have access to one thing they don't possess, we have the throne room of God with the Creator of the universe who tells us in Hebrews 4, "Come boldly before my throne."

You and I have access to prayer. I mean, you think about some of the great stories in the Bible. We think about Elijah, you realize that Elijah was outnumbered several hundred to one and who was it that won the battle that day? It was Elijah. Why? Because he prayed to God and God answered his prayer. The early apostles in the early days of the church, they were outnumbered tens of thousands to one and yet by the time you get to Acts 17, it says they turned the world upside down. You say, "How did that take place?" Because back in Acts 4 it says in the midst of persecution they prayed with boldness and it says that God showed up in a mighty way. Before Pentecost, they prayed for seven days. In other words, as we begin to see the voices gather, as we begin as the body of faith to gather ourselves whatever that looks like and whenever it looks like, understand that to try to out-duel them is futile at best.

So what did the Israelites do? They were outnumbered, they were outmatched, they prayed, and what does it say? They set a watch night and day. As you and I go forward in these days of "reestablishing and regathering," there are going to be those that mock and ridicule, and when their voices are not well-received they will gather friends and they will increase the pressure and we're gonna be tempted to kind of fight sword with sword, so to speak, but what did the Israelites do? They fought with prayer. They called on an Almighty God not only to hear their calls and case but to fight on their behalf. Let me remind you what the great prophet Zechariah said, "It is not by might nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord." So as we go in these days ahead, whatever they may or may not look like, understand no matter what verbiage is used, we have access to the throne room of God, we have access to prayer.

Now these first two oppositions, these first two criticisms that we see in the rebuilding of Jerusalem, in particular the temple, they come from the outside. They come from those who we wouldn't expect to come alongside. They come from those who we would naturally expect they're going to be in opposition. It's this third one where it gets a little personal. In fact, this is the one where it may hurt a little bit. We discover that the opposition begins to move its way to the inside because even though they kept being "the church" and even though they kept praying the opposition out, they began to hear the rhetoric. In fact, if you pick up the story in verse 10 it says,

10 And Judah said,

You see, we've got to push pause there for just a moment. This isn't the Amorites, this isn't the Samaritans, this isn't the Philistines, these are the ones – hear me clearly – who came out of Babylon. These are the ones who said, "Okay, Nehemiah, I'm up for the challenge. Alright, Ezra, I'll rebuild the building. I'm up for making this happen." Just two to three chapters earlier they were counted in a census as those that were willing to leave the comforts of Babylon to go to basically a hill with a bunch of rocks on it and to reestablish the place of God for the people of God,

10 And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.

Now the mockery we can deal with, the conspiracy, we'll be fine, but this is the one that's gonna hurt. When we, the people of God, start speaking against each other that we can't, we shouldn't, we ought not, what about, and they began to repeat the same language as what we're about to find out as the heathen. That's what the Lord calls Sanballat and Tobiah and these guys, and that's the hurtful part.

Now one of the best analogies that I've heard in recent days in regards to what you and I are walking through as a people of faith, now this one is not original to me, it was actually an article that was written by a pastor in Tennessee, he compared what we're walking through to a shark attack. Now some of you have heard this illustration but for the sake of all of us, allow me to repeat it. He said that you and I were going about our business as we often do just like people on a beach, when all of a sudden out of nowhere a shark is discovered. Now in a typical scene of a shark attack, you know what happens, what we've seen in the last 2+ months, the beach vacates itself, people run for the hills, they lock the beach down, they shut it up and say it's not safe to return. It sounds familiar, does it not? The other thing about the shark attack analogy is this, that even though it is horrible the fact that there are people who lost their lives and who were negatively affected by the shark attack, as a percentage very few people actually experienced the attack. The majority of the people experienced the fear of it happening to them.

It's a pretty good analogy, is it not? Here's where it gets real personal for those of us that are part of the body of Christ, for those of us who desire to gather, so to speak. The analogy is that pastors such as myself and leaders, that we're kind of the lifeguards. We're the ones as the shepherds, as the Bible would say, that deem it safe once again to return to the beach, it is safe again to go into the water. Here are the statistics of shark attacks and allow me to apply them to the church gathered. About 10-15% of the people who were on the beach are never gonna return to the beach again. They're nervous, they're scared, they remember what happened when it took place and they're just not going to go. There's about 10-15% of the people who they're trying to cut the lock to get to the beach even though the lifeguard is not on the stand yet, and I think we see that, do we not? We're having conversations with people even today saying, "I don't just think, I don't think we can ever gather again." And we have people saying, "Well, if they'd let me in through the door, I'd be there today." But it's the 70% in the middle that is of ultimate, shall we say, critical nature. Those are the individuals that want to be on the beach, they want to be a part of all that it is, they hear the voices that are never going back, they hear the voices that are already trying to climb the fence, and the biggest concern for them is what if it happens again? Now I don't want to step outside of my bounds but we are hearing from multiple sources that it appears that in months, maybe in years in the future, that we could see a resurgence of not maybe just this pandemic but one of likely nature, and a big question that we've got to answer as we regather is not coming back just per se, but how do we come back prepared for that "next wave," or prepared to handle things in the event that information goes contrary to what any of us would desire.

And so what takes place here, even their own say, "Oh, we can't do it. We shouldn't do it." I love how Nehemiah responds and this should be our response too. Go down to verse 17 of chapter 4, one of the great verses of the Bible, in fact, this is like a classic piece of literature. You know how a book is a classical piece of literature? Everybody quotes the book but nobody's read the book. You may have heard this statement but not known it was in Nehemiah 4, it says in verse 17,

17 They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.

In other words, what we see happening here is they're literally putting the bricks on the wall with one hand and fighting off their enemies with the other. In other words, as we go forward, as we become the body of Christ regathered, we've got to rebuild on one hand and we've got to stave off the possible inevitable with the other.

What's fascinating to me is when you get to the end of the story, in fact, when you get to verse 23 it says,

23 So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.

And that may sound odd to you that the Lord would allow that passage to be in the Scripture but here's what he's saying: they were so dedicated to the cause of reestablishing themselves and yet fighting off the inevitable that they didn't even bother with the wearing and the washing of their clothes in the sense of how it appeared. In other words, their gathering together, their worshiping the Lord was of greater value – hear me clearly – than the appearance that they had when they gathered. How often have you and I as individuals even collectively have been guilty of the culture of Christianity and not the Christ of Christianity? They found it more important to be the church than to look like the church.

So what's coming in the days ahead? Most likely some form of ridicule or mockery, some type of conspiracy of agencies and such, and we're even gonna have mutiny on the inside. It's gonna be internal. It's gonna be people even from within the body of Christ using the data of the world to question, "Should we even 'do it'?" And what did Nehemiah do? He put one hand on a brick, one hand on the sword. He said, "We're going to be cautious for that which is to come, but we're going to continue to become who God called us to be."

The fourth opposition, so to speak, is in the world of economics. Boy, do we hear that every day today. Everybody is concerned about how do we do this and how do we do that, how do we reestablish the monetary system, the banking system, retail and all those things. It's interesting when you get to chapter 5, there's an opposition that comes against the Israelites. Beginning in verse 3 it says,

3 Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands,
vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. 4
There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute,
and that upon our lands and vineyards.

Basically what they're saying is we have an economic problem right now that the establishment of this temple, that the rebuilding of this wall, there are things that are of greater priority than the place where we worship the Lord. And today we're hearing about all the debt that is being accumulated, we're hearing about all the stimulus and all the spending and there's a lot of questions, isn't it interesting that the same issues, we have mortgage, we have borrowed, the king's tribute, taxes, how are we gonna pull this off, if we focus on rebuilding a wall in Jerusalem in the temple, in other words, they were saying this is the last thing we should be worried about. We should focus on the economy then we'll worry about the church. I love the response of Nehemiah in verse 12 of chapter 5. It says,

12 Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them;
so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of
them, that they should do according to this promise.

Let me share with you what Nehemiah is saying there. He's telling the secular world, he's telling the "heathen," "We require nothing of you. We don't need your assistance. We, the people of faith, we got this."

Let me take just a moment, I know that we have people that are watching and listening literally from all over the world, but I want to thank you the people of First Baptist, Opelika, and maybe even those who were not originally a part of us but have now become a part of us in recent days, I want to thank you for your faithfulness, your faithfulness in being a part of a virtual worship service that you would have never dreamed of before, your faithfulness to continue to be the body of Christ scattered rather than gathered, but also your faithfulness when it comes to giving. In fact, this morning we had a situation where we already had people already lined up coming by the Post Office box that we've set up to contribute, to give, to be faithful in their finances. You know, I am amazed, in fact, when this began 9+ weeks ago, I didn't know what it was gonna look like. I didn't know what to expect when it came to people's willingness to give sacrificially and financially, and I am amazed at God's faithfulness and your faithfulness as we continue to see people faithful with their resources so that we can continue to provide the truth of God's word, the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ just in a different form of communication.

That being said, I'm sure many of you are aware that in days past there's been a lot of opportunity, shall I say, to receive resources from other means, to acquire financial stability from outside the people of faith and in particular outside the local congregation. Now one of the things or, shall I say, one of the many reasons that we have not sought any of those avenues is I went back and began to read the history book of First Baptist Church of Opelika again, and I know you're wondering, "We have a history book?" Oh,

we do and I went back, do you know what I discovered about this incredible congregation? We survived the Civil War. We survived World War I. We survived the Spanish Flu of 1918. We survived World War II, Korea, Vietnam. We survived the '60s. We survived 9/11. We survived all that mess and nowhere can I find in the history book anywhere where we need a "bail-out" or we needed some type of extra provision anywhere because the people of God who believed in an Almighty God who could provide for them trusted him not just with their soul but with their finances.

I love what Nehemiah says, "We will cost you nothing." What a testimony. As we go in the days ahead where people begin to say, "Shouldn't we be focused on the economy? Why are we so concerned about gathering as believers?" We go this, folks. Don't worry about it. We, the body of Christ, have been given ample resources to be the body of Christ without soliciting the, shall we say, opportunities that others may bring our way.

Last but not least, what's next? We've dealt with mockery and ridicule, conspiracy, we've even dealt with mutiny from the inside, and even a dire economic situation. This last one is what we call slander. In fact, we go to chapter 6 and we discover a situation that has a unique parallel particularly in the book of Ezra. We focused on this last week, that as Ezra began to establish the temple and began to establish the proper worship of the one true God, that there were letters that were written, there was communication that was written about them that was not even true. Now this is different than the mockery or ridicule. It's one thing to have a certain set of data and to look at it from different perspectives, it's a whole different thing just to make stuff up and claim somebody guilty of something they didn't even do.

Here we find ourselves in chapter 6. We have again this conspiracy, these people, they've tried everything, they've even tried to get opposition from internal, they've tried the economy, when you get to verse 2 it says,

2 That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. 3 And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? 4 Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner. 5 Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; 6 Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen,

And for the rest of the chapter it begins to do exactly what we find in the book of Ezra, they claimed that the Israelites will not be good citizens, they claimed that they are rebellious in nature, that they will sign an agreement and then they will not hold themselves to it. It's what we call slander. They are accusing them of things they're not even guilty of. Folks, I hate to tell you but if it happened as they reestablish the temple and the walls in Jerusalem, I think we can likely see it in our days ahead as we, the church, scattered and became the church gathered, there's gonna be things said about,

written about, spoken of that aren't even true. We're gonna be accused of doing things we haven't even thought of doing yet.

And yet how did Nehemiah respond? I love his response. This is actually back in verse 3. It says, "And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." Literally what he says is, "I'm not even gonna waste my time on this because it won't do any good." I have a dear friend of mine back in the state of Texas who in a situation such as this would say, "Jeff, it doesn't matter what you say. Every word you speak is going to be used against you." And that's exactly what Nehemiah was saying.

Now I will say and I hate to use this but it's just the truth from God's word, this slanderous letter actually caused a year delay in the establishment of the temple because they had to wait it out. You say, "Well, why didn't they fight it out?" Because whatever they said would be used against them. Allow me to quote the great American writer Mark Twain. One of my favorite quotes, he says, "Don't have an argument with stupid people, they will drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience." That's exactly what Nehemiah was saying is, "Why would I argue with people who don't care about the facts? Why would I argue with people who don't care if it's actually accurate what they're saying?" In the days ahead you and I could experience the same thing.

And so as we look through these, here's the thing I want you to hear, that in every single one of the situations rather than lowering themselves to the world's ideals, they raised themselves up to the purpose and the plan of God in their life. Now historically speaking, that temple was delayed for about a year and I know there are some of you, that 10-15% that are ready to get back to the beach saying, "I can't wait another day, must less a year." There's some of you saying, "Hey, if it's two or three years, I'll be good." And there's a lot of you that are somewhere in between. And the fact is that none of us know exactly when and how the church scattered, at least here in Opelika, will become the church gathered.

You know, it's interesting we began by talking about the difference between information and communication. Sure, you're not seated in a pew in this incredibly beautiful room, you're at your home, your back porch or wherever you find yourself, but you know the word of God is still as true today as it was nine weeks ago when this all began. Do you know what the Bible says? The Bible says that today is the day of salvation. You know, maybe you're one of those individuals who said, "You know what? I keep hearing the message of Jesus, I keep hearing the need for my sin to be forgiven, whenever they open up the church again, I'm gonna go down there, I'm gonna take care of business." What if that doesn't happen for a while? What if it is several weeks, several months, several years? You say, "What? What do you mean?" The Bible says today is the day of salvation and you know what I discover in the Bible? That you don't have to be in a physical church building to be saved. You don't have to be gathered around 1,000+ people. You don't have to have an invitation. By the way, I love all those things but the Bible says today is the day of salvation and maybe you're one of those individuals who said, "Well, when the church house opens up, I'm gonna go down there and I'm gonna get right with the Lord." You cannot determine your eternity on whether or not these doors are locked

or unlocked, and maybe you're that person today, can I encourage you don't worry about when the campus opens up again, the Lord has opened up your heart to the truth of his word and do what Romans 10 says today, call on the name of the Lord and be saved.

You don't have to be on this campus, you just have to have a conversation with the Lord and maybe your conversation wherever you find yourself today would sound a little something like this. Now let me remind you, you don't have to repeat the exact words I would use. This isn't kind of a pete and repeat situation, this is a cry of your heart and maybe your cry today would be something like, "God, today I realize I've got a sin problem. I've messed up. I've been places I shouldn't have been, done things I shouldn't have done, I've said things I shouldn't have said and I realize that that puts me in a pretty bad predicament with you. God, I believe today that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. God, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ was born on my behalf, lived a sinless life on my behalf, died a cruel death on my behalf, and rose from the grave so that I could be forgiven and I could be saved."