

# Pursuing God: Greater Faithfulness and New Glory

## Ezra 2

**MPS** God calls people to follow Him by faith that we might see His faithfulness in new ways for new glory.

**OBJ** Every person can understand God's greater faithfulness for new glory by Four Challenges.

**INTRO** Are you a "list maker"? Many of you I know are. Lists play important roles for many reasons. Today we consider a list that is far more important than most recognize as we look toward greater faithfulness and new glory.

**READ** Ezra 2:1-2, 36, 40, 43, 55, 58, 59b, 62-63, 64-67, 68-70

*Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. <sup>2</sup>They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.*

<sup>36</sup>The priests... <sup>40</sup>The Levites... <sup>43</sup>The temple servants... <sup>55</sup>The sons of Solomon's servants:

<sup>58</sup>All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.

<sup>59</sup>The following were those who came up...though they could not prove their fathers' houses or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel:

<sup>62</sup>These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. <sup>63</sup>The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.

<sup>64</sup>The whole assembly together was 42,360, <sup>65</sup>besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337, and they had 200 male and female singers. <sup>66</sup>Their horses were 736, their mules were 245, <sup>67</sup>their camels were 435, and their donkeys were 6,720.

<sup>68</sup>Some of the heads of families, when they came to the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem, made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site. <sup>69</sup>According to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work 61,000 darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priests' garments.

<sup>70</sup>Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel in their towns.

The list raises some important questions. First, "Who are these people?" The list includes those who could prove their lineage and some who could not. It identifies groups which all had responsibilities for different aspects of religious life<sup>36-58</sup>, like priests, Levites, and assistants who would all be considered levels of staff and servants in the church today. We know that the number of servants for the Temple work was about ten percent of the total number of people. And while there is debate, we can trust that "the overall total remains correct."<sup>1</sup> This list records the first wave of exiles who returned to Jerusalem "under the leadership of Zerubbabel."<sup>2</sup>

The second question may be even more helpful for our purposes, "WHY is such a list necessary?" The exact purpose of the list is not clear, but a number of important factors are clear. The Israelites were committed to accurate records of God's people. We see this throughout the Bible. They were committed to the purity of Israel, meaning to their heritage as a nation, to recognize the blessing of God.<sup>3</sup> This recognition meant that they needed to be able to recognize one another and the

<sup>1</sup> Mervin Breneman, [Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther](#), electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 85.

<sup>2</sup> F. Charles Fensham, [The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah](#), The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 47.

<sup>3</sup> J. G. McConville, [Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther](#), The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 17. McConville states, "The ancient constitution of Israel is thus in every way respected. The first Jews to return from exile were evidently determined to keep the community pure as "Israel" enters upon this new phase, with new opportunities to know the blessing of God."



group as a continuation of the Israelite pre-exile community.<sup>4</sup> This is a practical recognition of God's calling on their nation and them as a people. A third reason for the list's importance specifically addresses the groups identified. Qualification for a religious leader was held to a high standard. Scholar Marvin Breneman explains, "A principle that continued into the New Testament was that spiritual leadership carries higher qualifications and demands than membership in the community of faith. From the time of Moses (Num 16:40), descent from Aaron was an essential qualification for priesthood. So to avoid defilement or the Lord's displeasure, these priests were excluded."<sup>5</sup> These three reasons alone make this list very important, but one final reason really brings it all together. Marvin Breneman states, "Whatever the list's purpose, these individuals were honored as being the first to return (Neh 7:5), showing their faith in the promises of God and especially the value they placed on the land God had promised to Abraham."<sup>6</sup>

**This chapter is an important historical and religious record.** Much like Covenant Membership in a local church, records are important because they identify whose "on-mission", committed to the Lord, His work, and to one another. Some people will say, "Records of attendance and giving do not matter. What really matters is what happens in an individual heart." I tell you, without those who commit to place themselves "on record", there is very little work that happens in individual hearts because there is no one who is committed to the work.

**APPL** Covenant Membership in the local church is far more than only a list! You can learn all about LifePoint THIS weekend at NAVigation Series, LifePoint's Covenant Membership Seminar, on Friday night or Saturday morning. Why not join us and take that next step for the growth and maturity of your spiritual walk with Jesus Christ. Let us know this morning and we will help you get registered.

Ezra Two records those who were the first to respond to pursue God in greater faithfulness to new glory. It should not be missed that this was a significant step of faith for every person. Sometimes following God can be the smallest step that demands the greatest strength. And other times it can appear to be the greatest leap that seems completely impossible. But in all God always proves Himself able because He is faithful and true.<sup>2Cor9:8-9</sup> "The chapter is dominated in the end, however, by a sense of excitement at a new opportunity—an opportunity which exists because God's mercies are "new every morning" (Lam. 3:23)."<sup>7</sup> Today we learn,

**God calls people to follow Him by faith that we might see His faithfulness in new ways for new glory.**

**TRANS** Whether this felt like a simple step or a giant leap, faith was demanded from every person. And any situation that demands faith will be confronted by challenges that always arise.

**OBJ 4 Challenges that confront your faith in Pursing God, to learn God's greater faithfulness for New Glory.**

## **#1: Obedience to God**

God always expects that his people will obey his commands, "for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you."<sup>Prv3:2</sup> You may ask, "How can obedience challenge faith?" Anything that demands faith to obey is an automatic challenge. **Obeying God's commands and following His call both require daily faith.**

<sup>4</sup>Mervin Breneman, [Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther](#), electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 78–79. Breneman explains, "Again the author emphasized the continuity of God's covenant people. The material is presented to show God's providence in reestablishing the covenant community, in reordering its religious life (Neh 8–10), and in revitalizing its cultural heritage (Neh 11–13). Thus the identification of the families and their place of origin was important for the self-identity of the people. They needed to recognize their roots in the preexilic Israelite community as reassurance that they were the continuation of God's redemptive plan, that God would not forsake them."

<sup>5</sup>Mervin Breneman, [Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther](#), electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 83.

<sup>6</sup> Mervin Breneman, [Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther](#), electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 75.

<sup>7</sup>J. G. McConville, [Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther](#), The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 18.



**Obedience challenges our faith to obey** when we substitute yesterday's obedience for today's leading. "I've obeyed once, in one area / way, I don't have to obey in other areas / ways." When we do this, we turn our obedience into self-righteousness, beckoning God to accept us for it. **Yesterday's obedience will fuel but never satisfy today's pursuit of God.**

**Those who were taken into exile** would have to work through a long history of emotions remembering all that they had experienced. None the least of which was "What about last time, God?"; "Why did we have to leave in the first place?" How hard it can be to trust God when you've seen failure or tasted defeat in your spiritual life. Then, to leave your present life and walk right back into where you failed or had been defeated. **Would you have the faith to walk back into failure and defeat, trusting God to provide for you?**

Some today wrestle with trusting God as He calls to a 'place' you've been, a 'place that you remember' all too well; failure, defeat, pain and all that accompanied it: to reconcile a relationship / friendship, restore trust, engage a conversation to finish what was left undone. Others struggle with God's commands because they do not understand, or agree, so want to remove the need to obey. It may feel like a 'leap into the unknown', but God sends you because He has glory that He wants to work through you.

**ILLUS** Andre Crouch's classic song, "Through It All", holds one of the greatest lines that remind us of this trust. "If I never had a problem, I wouldn't know that He could solve them. I wouldn't know what faith in God could do."

Some people followed with a bedrock confidence of faith, while others followed with considerable fear and trepidation accompanying every step. **And of both "types" of people do you know who found God faithful? BOTH!** God's faithfulness is not determined by the strength nor the amount of your faith, but by the faithfulness of His character. **Weak faith and strong faith are still faith. Obedience hinged on the weakest faith finds the same faithfulness as any other!**

Obedience is always a challenge in pursuing God because it requires faith, from the first time to every moment after. From first to last breath, the Christian life is one to be lived by faith. **When God commands or calls, let past obedience remind you of God's faithfulness and fuel you to follow for greater glory as you pursue God.**

## **#2: Reaction from Anxiety-induced and Fear-driven**

Those born in exile could have easily said "No. What we have is enough. Let's not mess it up." Those taken into exile could have defaulted to pursuing 'the good ole days' or refusing to return to trauma. Both are a reaction of fear or anxiety that defaults to perceived comfort instead of a faith-driven following of unknown or pre-determined future by past memory.

Past successes can be the greatest hindrance to future faithfulness when we allow them to any need for future faith. Past failures can be the greatest hindrance when we allow past failures or trauma to forsake faith. Isn't it interesting how past successes and failures can deceive us to lead us to the same place, out of God's will. None of us would say we want to live in fear. And I know of no one that enjoys their anxiety. But we are so quick to let them both determine life. **Fear defaults to what is known over what is unknown, and anxiety avoids any threat, even when they produce what is less than desirable, because we see it as manageable.**

God is leading some today to a place where you've never been, to do what you've never done. God leads into the 'unknown' so He is the one most familiar to us, the most trusted by us and the most precious for us. In the 'unknown', faith clings with greater fervency and draws in greater measure to find what our heart longs for and what God provides. When your heart experiences its greatest moment of need, God shows His greater faithfulness. **You will only know God's greater faithfulness for new glory when you confess the false-security of fears and lies of anxiety.**

## **#3: Chaos and Confusion from the Crowd**

There was considerable variety of people in this returning group. Though they shared a common heritage, there was great diversity among them. Plus, the journey itself would demand a dependence upon people who were likely little known or



completely unknown. When the crowd mounts and the diversity grows, we can quickly lose our place. A common question we often ask in this type of situation is, “Where do I find my place?” “Do I ‘vie for status’ or ‘serve’ to make a place for others?” The less secure / anchored our identity and security in Christ, the more pressing this question becomes.

When God stirs your heart to follow, never reduce your place to insignificance and never default to only serve, or worry about, self. God uses every person differently, but He uses every person that He calls for glory. When you ask the question, “Where do I fit?”, never default to vying for position or prominence, but always serve God by serving others. This is the model of Jesus Christ who came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. Faith leads us to look to God to remember our identity and acceptance is in Christ, so we are set free to serve.

When we pursue God by serving, we trust His work to place us where He wants us, and bring to us what He has for us. Serving is our path to know the Lord’s greater faithfulness and new glory. Serving is never just an activity we do to impress God, but a posture we willingly take on to make God known and glorify Him through our life.

#### #4: Partial Participation

Even in ‘pursuing God’ we still try to control our circumstances and hold back areas of control from Him. We want to be only as invested as needed for best return or experience. Jesus says that the sure way to know where your heart is truly rested is to look at where your finances are invested: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21

**Financial investment nurtures a fervent prayerfulness and a spiritual hunger like nothing else can.** Money creates a false sense of security and provision in life. When we have it, we believe we can have anything we need. But God tells us that this is not true. Rather, when we have Him, in faith, we have all we need and nothing to fear. When your heart and treasure are aligned, it produces a spiritual response of faith to God.

Faith leads us not to look at our money to consider our giving, but to look at our whole life. The right question is not “do I have anything to give God?”, but “How should I steward all God has given me by giving to his work?” When you pursue God by faith, your finances are as much a part of your participation as every other part of your life. When you trust to obey God in your finances, you transform your spiritual life like never before. Faith demands we deny partial participation for whole life obedience. Partial participation will never produce the full satisfaction your desire from God. You won’t know His all-satisfying goodness nor His greater faithfulness because you only make available such a small part of your heart.

God calls people to follow Him by faith that we might see His faithfulness in new ways for new glory.

**CLOSE** This list tells us one main truth: God is worthy of your faith to “go”. He is worthy of all your obedience. When you meet the challenges to your faith with faith to pursue God, there you will find God. Greater faithfulness and new glory is never what we do for God, but what He becomes to us as we pursue Him by faith. God is calling each of us to pursue Him in greater ways; understanding, trust, service, sacrifice, etc. You are not alone. He is working, calling you to join him. What He calls you to may feel like a leap, or another step. Trust Him, say “Yes” to, and pursue Him today

