

## Pursuing God: Faithfulness on the Journey

### Ezra 8

**MPS** Christians live in faithful obedience to God's mission by God's faithfulness upon their lives.

**OBJ** Three Important lessons that teach how we must trust God's faithfulness to empower our own.

**INTRO** Have you ever felt the presence of God on you for some particular purpose?

In 2002 I lead a team to Guatemala on a mission trip. Our main focus was prayer-walking and evangelizing a region near Esquipulas, GUA, to plant a church. Each morning we would walk the streets praying for the homes we passed. That afternoon we would return to knock on doors and try to talk to people. We experienced God do some amazing things among our groups every day, except for one. On the day before we were set to leave we were pressed for time, so we decided not to prayerwalk and only knock on doors. Every door got shut in our face, and we were chased by dogs in the streets. We came to the end of the road, with only one house remaining 100 yards further. A lady answered and was very hesitant to talk to us. Asking her why, she told us that a witch lived in the last house and was watching her. The witch had cast a spell on us that day and she would curse anyone caught talking to us. As soon as she said this she screamed, cried out, "the devil dog is coming for me", and slammed the door. Since it was the last house, and we were completely defeated, we decided it was time to go. Later that night in our debrief we were discussing the "defeat of the day". **We reached one conclusion as to why our day was so defeating; we failed in the work because we failed to pray before we went to work.**

Ezra 8 provides more insight to the second wave of returning exiles. What Ezra 7 overviewed Ezra 8 outlines in greater detail, the journey of pursuing God by serving His mission. Ezra 7 introduced that on which we should center our life, the Word of God. The life centered on God's Word is the life the hand of God rests upon. Ezra 8 reveals that the way one lives centered on God's Word is through faithful obedience. When a person centers life on God's Word to walk in faithful obedience and serve God's mission, a distinctive power from God rests on their life. **And we learn that the faithfulness of God fuels the faithful obedience of His people.**

**Christians live in faithful obedience to God's mission by God's faithfulness upon their lives.**

Pursuing God is a journey of one's whole life! This was not just a trip for these families nor only a new place to live, but a movement of life, a whole way of living. When we build our life centered on Jesus Christ and His Word, everything becomes about Him. Faithfulness may appear to some as bothering with details many would consider unimportant or tedious. But faithfulness always involves giving attention and priority to that which God has given instruction. The life upon which the hand of God rests is distinguished by Him; His power and might, favor and righteousness, and glory. All who see may not immediately recognize, but the one who lives with the hand of God upon them prioritizes faithfulness to God because they rest in His faithfulness.

**How does one live faithfully on the journey of pursuing God?** This what we give attention to this morning.

Ezra 8 has three major sections where God's hand rests upon the people. Where God's favor rests we will give attention to discern how our faithfulness should be practiced because His faithfulness empowers our living.

**OBJ** Three lessons teach us how we trust God's faithfulness to empower our faithfulness to obey Him.

**TRANS** First, let's consider...

**The PEOPLE of the journey.** 8:1-20

The people are not unimportant to Ezra. We are provided a list of those who return with Ezra. One commentator points out that twelve family units are listed, likely representing the 12 tribes of Israel. "In vv. 3b-14 twelve families are listed. Many



believe this emphasizes that they represent all of Israel, which was made up of twelve tribes.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout Ezra we have seen indications of all the tribes represented as a reminder that God has not forgotten any of them.

Ezra gathers the people as the river to prepare for the trip. As he reviews all the people he makes one important finding, there are no sons of Levi. Levites were those charged to lead in the temple work, specifically, leading the people in their worship and relationship with God. Ezra takes leaders from among the people and sends them to go and bring some sons of Levi to go with them as ministers for the house of God. Some may see this as unimportant, but Ezra held up the whole journey until they had the right people as ministers for the house of God among them. He ensures there are Levites, God’s appointed leaders, to lead the people in worship. And once they have the right leaders among them for worship, Ezra recognizes God’s hand upon them.

Ezra prioritized making sure there were Levites to lead. The people were important to God. They were His people, sent to bear witness to His glory and righteousness in the land among all the other peoples of the world. They are important not because of who they are but rather because of who they represented. And because they were God’s people in the land meant there must be priority given to God’s leadership among them to lead them for God’s purpose / mission. [Godly leadership is not about importance of individual but of purpose, ensuring your life remains under God’s faithful hand.](#)

[Lesson 1: Faithfulness in pursuing God means you prioritize surrounding your life with Jesus-centered fellowship and Biblically-qualified leadership.](#) God cares how you live your life, because every day is a journey of walking with Him on mission in this world. The people you fill your life with will be the ones that influence you, in the activities and recreations you participate in and the direction you go in life, in the way you think, process, and make decisions, and ultimately in shaping the values you embrace and the things you most adore with your life.

Surrounding your life for the purpose of godly influence includes three aspects, fellowship, followship, and leadership. Fellowship is the network of relationships with other Christians in the local church centered on Jesus Christ by Holy Spirit. It is the environment that sources Christians to draw strength from the Lord Jesus through one another, by encouragement and exhortation, mutual sharing of life and specific ministry among one another. This is why we champion community and life together among the church, not for community sake but for fellowship to flourish, so God’s people can be strengthened to remain faithful in response to His faithfulness. This can seem so simple that many disregard its true importance. [The Bible teaches that fellowship within the local church is critical and essential for every Christian.](#)<sup>Acts2:42</sup>

**From fellowship flows followship and leadership.** As in the Old Testament, God has provided clear instruction for who He has determined to lead His people, and under which His favor rests on His people. God ordained relationships as the church to source faithfully following Him that champions followship to godly, Biblically-qualified leadership.

**APPL** Generations have allowed cultural influences to convolute faithfulness to Biblical leadership. The church has always been susceptible to charisma, and often convoluted it with godly anointing. They are not the same. A generation ago we became programmed to find the most skilled professional, so we began to think skill and talent as a best qualifier for spiritual leadership. In recent decades influence has shifted again with the values of the culture. In a culture consumed by sexuality, we are inclined to adopt leaders by attributes of attraction or outwardly observed and preferred above inner character. In a culture that rejects authority and idolizes “Connectedness”, because life is filled with false connections, leaders are judged by “how much they look like me” ABOVE how much look like Jesus. In a culture that rejects authority and idolizes “trending topics”, leaders are judged by “how they understand or tolerate, even accept and coddle, my individual life experience” ABOVE how well they know and are committed to know and proclaim God’s Truth. Charisma, skill, talent, ability, education and experience are all valuable qualities, but are only beneficial for the church when character is Biblically-qualified. Otherwise, these qualities will be used for personal gain and not yielded for God’s purposes. The priority of Biblically-qualified leadership is not about any individual, but trusting the faithfulness of God’s provision. [God’s](#)

---

<sup>1</sup> Mervin Breneman, [Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther](#), electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 138–139.



hand of favor and strength rests upon His people when faithful leadership and fellowship that cultivates gospel fellowship is prioritized.

**TRANS** Next, we consider how Ezra led them to prepare for the journey.

**The PREPARATION for the journey.** .21-30

Once everyone is gathered at the river, they now make preparation for the journey. Physical and material preparations have been made, but Ezra leads in spiritual preparation. He proclaims a fast to humble themselves before God, to seek His safety and protection, and provision in the journey. Ezra acknowledges that he recognizes the real dangers and threats that they will potentially encounter. And he didn't want to make request of the King because he had already testified that God would take care of them. **Ezra had plenty of fear, but this preparation was an action of submitting his fear to God in faith.**

**Faithful preparation led to right priorities for the journey.**<sup>8:24-30</sup> Their spiritual preparation reminded them that who they were, their identity as God's people, determined the purpose for their life and this journey, to serve His mission, and therefore what should receive first priority at all times, worship for God's glory. **Spiritual preparation gave each person unity in the vision and strength of heart for the journey.**

**Lesson 2: Faithfulness in pursuing God begins by fully submitting our lives to walk by faith in obedience to God to fulfill His purposes for His glory.**

Fasting is process of seeking God to submit one's whole being to Him. It reorients our lives to God, in direction, action, timing, purpose, and glory. In fasting, the confusion of the mind and anxiousness of the heart are submitted to God for His peace and clarity. Every person who prepares themselves in this way is filled by God's presence for the whole journey. Through the preparation of fasting and submitting oneself to God, one's life gets oriented to His power and promise above any earthly threat. **And so Ezra testifies in faith<sup>8:22</sup> that which he has learned by testing from the fire of life.**

*The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.*

<sup>16</sup>*The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.* **Psalm 34:15-16**

This promise is so important for us to remember that Peter cites it to Christians in the First Century too.<sup>1Ptr3.12</sup>

**Until in faith you submit your life to God, you will never obey by faith to journey with or pursue God.** You will always defer to interpret God's will as your understanding or ability because it just won't make sense if it is otherwise beyond you. The prayer for us of verses 21-23 is simply, "God, if you are not in this, I don't want anything to do with this. But if you are, do not let me go anywhere else." Trusting God doesn't always put your life on the extreme edge of life or death, physically-speaking, but it ALWAYS does spiritually-speaking. The very essence of the Christian life and following Jesus means you must ALWAYS die-to-self first before you can ever live for Christ.<sup>Luke9:23</sup>

**APPL** **Do you know why it "seems" God doesn't answer your prayers or respond to your needs?** Because so often we approach God with our request instead of making our petition from a heart that has been surrendered. When you pray this way, your request is the very thing that's interfering in your relationship with God. Even a country singer knows this.

**ILLUS** Garth Brooks' hit song "Unanswered Prayers" begins with he and his wife running into an old girlfriend at a football game. The encounter makes him thankful that God didn't answer all his prayers in the way he prayed or wanted. The Chorus echos: "Remember when you're talkin' to the man upstairs; That just because he may not answer doesn't mean he don't care; Some of God's greatest gifts are unanswered prayers."

Pursuing God begins with obedience by faith to His will and purpose as your highest aim. **God's hand of favor and strength rests upon His people who give priority to submitting their whole lives to Him, their fears for faith, their weakness and vulnerability for His divine protection and provision, and their personal desires for His eternal glory and pleasures.**

**TRANS** Finally, the journey is complete and we see how God's hand continues to rest on His people in praise.

**The PRAISE of the journey.** .31-36



Once they arrive in Jerusalem, they praise God to recognize His hand that was upon them the whole way. The first thing they did was to do nothing. Sometimes the greatest act of faith prioritizes rest, and that's what they did. Next, they praised God by faithful stewardship. They counted all the elements of worship that they had brought with them to ensure it was all still there. Then, they offered sacrifices to God to bear testimony to His power on them for the journey. Finally, they bore witness to the local governor by the letter from the King that told why they had come. [Every act upon their arrival was one of praise to God, in recognizing what He had done and that He had been faithful to His promise.](#)

**Lesson 3: Faithfulness in pursuing God always culminates in all praise to God because of complete dependency on God.**

We are far too often far more concerned with God guaranteeing us the life we desire MORE THAN trusting Him to pursue the life He is leading us in as He transforms us. But when we live this way, instead of by faith, we deny Him glory and praise because this kind of living demands no faith on our part. This is evident in the activities of life, as well as the thinking of life.

**ILLUS** When our heart is not set to obey God, our minds will not remember to honor God, and our tongues will not be careful to praise God. This pattern reveals itself in simple reflections. We get asked, "How was your trip? Did God go with you?" Our response, "The trip was great. God was probably with us but turns out we didn't need Him. We had no problems at all." Instead of, God made provisions and His protection every step of the way.

When you trust God for your protection and provision, you don't look to threat or risk to decide whether or not to obey or go. You trust God's plan. You don't measure success on personal gain or advantage, but on faithfulness to God's plan. And you don't testify to what you did, but to what God accomplished by His mighty hand. [The Christian life is one fully expended for the glory and praise of God, and our testimony of His faithfulness is careful to declare this to all.](#)

**Christians live in faithful obedience to God's mission by God's faithfulness upon their lives.**

You can't just talk about it or go about it any way you want. Pursuing God is only undertaken when our hearts are fully submitted to Him, our minds fully focused, our hands completely surrendered to serve Him, and our feet ready to follow. [Faithfulness in pursuing God means trusting fully in His faithfulness for your obedience.](#)

