

Ezra's Example

Ezra 7:10

At Rodgers Baptist Church we have a blessed tradition of beginning every year with a focus on the centrality of God's Word, and a challenge to read through the Bible in a year. We call this focus "Bible Sunday." Obviously, that does not mean the Bible is out of focus the other 51 Sundays of the year. It is not! Another blessed tradition of this church is that we stand on, are rooted in, and faithfully proclaim God's Word.

For this year's Bible Sunday lesson I invite you to turn in your Bibles to **Ezra 7:10**. This verse bears testimony of the Old Testament scribe Ezra. Before we read the verse let me explain the difference between an Old Testament scribe and a prophet. They were both messengers of the will of God, but prophets received and proclaimed *new revelations* from the Lord, whereas scribes proclaimed, explained and applied the truths already revealed. That is the position that we are in also. The Bible is all the revelation that we need. There are no *new* revelations from God. God's revelation to man is found in the Scriptures, and they are complete.

So, let's read **Ezra 7:10**:

"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do [it], and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."

Ezra provides an example that Christians need to follow! There are four attributes of Ezra that I want you to notice, and, hopefully, commit yourself to.

Prepare Your Heart

If you are to follow Ezra's example, you must first prepare your heart. How is that accomplished? You must:

1. Pray for God's guidance

Jesus says in **Matthew 7:7**:

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

Of the many things that we should ask, seek, and knock, God's wisdom is the greatest. The only way to gain knowledge, wisdom, and discernment is through the Spirit of God. And that starts with prayer.

James 1:5:

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

Now, how do you think God will supply you with this abundance of wisdom that He has promised? Do any here believe that you just ask and wait for an anointing of wisdom, knowledge, and discernment? Look to **Proverbs 2:1-6**:

"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, [and] apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, [and] liftest up thy voice for understanding; If

thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as [for] hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth [cometh] knowledge and understanding.”

Knowledge, wisdom, discernment, all of these things come from God - *through* the Scripture - and to us. Pray for God's guidance as you prepare to delve into His Word.

2. Confession of Sin

There is a second step of preparation that is necessary before we can pursue the truths found in God's Word, and that is *confession of sin*. That is stated very plainly in two sections of Scripture. Look in **James 1:21**.

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

It is impossible to profitably study the Scriptures with an impure mind.

Once we have prayed for God's guidance and confessed our sins, then we will be prepared to...

Pursue Him in His Word

Ezra sought after the Lord, and the only place you can go to find God is in His Word. Oh, sure, there is evidence of God all around us. God has written two infallible, inerrant, completely true revelations. One is the Bible, and the other is creation. General revelation will point people to God's glory (**Romans 1:20**), but salvation and growth in Christ comes by hearing and heeding His special revelation. All creation is evidence of God's power, but to really find God you must go to the Scriptures. **1 Peter 2:1-2**:

“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, **desire** the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:” (emphasis added)

Desire for Scripture

Do you desire Scripture the way a newborn desires milk? If you're going to study the Bible, then you have to desire it. I have heard a story about the famous philosopher Socrates. I don't know if it's true or not, but since it illustrates my point really well I'm going to use it. Socrates was the leading philosopher and teacher of his time and every serious student wanted to be his pupil. The story states that a young man approached Socrates and said, “Sir, I would like to be your pupil. Would you teach me?”

Socrates just said “Follow me” then turned and walked into the water, and continued walking until he and this young man were both about chin deep in the water. Socrates turned to the young man; put both hands on his head and shoved him under the water, holding him there. Wanting to exercise great respect for the teacher, the young man tried his best quietly to remain below the surface and hold his breath, but after a few moments that became impossible. He began to fight his way back to the surface, with Socrates continuing to hold him underwater. Finally he let go. The young man burst out of the water coughing up water and

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yelling at the older man. Socrates just looked at him and said, "When you want to know as desperately as you want to breathe, then I'll be your teacher."

As newborns desire their mother's milk we are to desire the pure, spiritual milk of the Word. Ezra "*prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord.*" Ezra had a *desire* for Scripture. He was a serious, diligent student of Scripture. You and I must be also!

The only way to gain knowledge of Scripture is by *reading* it. There is no shortcut to this. It is vital that we spend time daily in the Word of God and in prayer. As pastors we must not only teach and preach the Bible, we must motivate and equip our people to also be students of God's Word. Our desire, for ourselves and our people, should be to say as the Psalmist did, "*I delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word*" (119:16).

Something is wrong if Christians come to church, plug into the Bible, and then unplug themselves on the way out; waiting for the next service to reconnect with the Word of God. A daily walk, a right fellowship with the Lord, cannot be accomplished without spending time daily in God's Word.

Are we, like Ezra, pursuing the depth of truths found in God's Word? Oh, how we need to be!

Practice and Proclaim Biblical Truth

Not only should we pursue biblical truth as did Ezra, but we should also practice and proclaim the truths that we discover. Our text simply says, "*Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it...*" If we desire our families and the people in our churches to put into practice the truths of God's Word, then we must set the example. We learn the Word to live the Word. "*Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves,*" is the charge we have been given in **James 1:22**. The ultimate goal of Bible study is not increased knowledge but increased holiness and Christlikeness.

"*Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.*" Ezra practiced what he preached! I encourage you to read the book of **Ezra** and see for yourself how this man always put his faith and trust in the Lord for all matters. How he always did that which God commanded through Scripture no matter what the circumstances might be. Ezra was the first of the expository preachers. Listen to this passage from **Nehemiah 8**:

"And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

What a preacher! Ezra was not ashamed to proclaim the Word of God. I find it curious when people claim to have a love for the Bible, and claim to be in it daily, and yet never practice or proclaim what they claim to cherish.

Beloved, we need to follow **Ezra's Example**. We need to **prepare** our hearts by asking for God's guidance and through confession of our sin. We must diligently **pursue** God's truths. *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth."* **2 Timothy 2:15**. And, lastly but so important, we must be committed to **practice** those truths *"Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only"* and we must **proclaim** - teach- others those truths that we have diligently sought and learned. One wise old preacher told a young preacher, *"The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."* **2 Timothy 2:2**.

Are you following **Ezra's example**? If not, why don't you commit yourself to begin today?