

Ezra: The Practice of the Spiritual Disciplines

“The books of Ezra and Nehemiah bear the names of the key person in each of the books. Until the third century A.D., though, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah were regarded as a single book. Both books contain material in the other, and they complete each other. While Ezra provides us with key historical insights, it is rich in messages for God’s people. Several key themes are found in the book of Ezra: (1) holiness; (2) Scripture; (3) worship; and (4) prayer and fasting.”

A **scribe** was trained in writing skills used to record events and decisions.

A **priest** blessed God’s people, helped them understand God’s will, and instructed people in God’s Word.

What is known about Ezra?

- Served as a **scribe** and **priest**.
- Sent to **Jerusalem** by King Artaxerxes in 458 B.C.
- Led God’s people to deal with mixed **marriages**.
- Modeled for the people a **practice** of the spiritual disciplines.

1. God’s work requires His people to **engage** at various levels.

Ezra 1:2-4 – *“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”*

2. God calls His people to be faithful **stewards** of time, talent, and treasure.

Ezra 2:68-69 – *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. 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.*

3. God expects His people to be **united** about the purpose and practice of worship.

Ezra 3:1-3 – *When the seventh month came, and the children of Israel were in the towns, the people gathered as one man to Jerusalem. Then arose Jeshua the son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel with his kinsmen, and they built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written*

in the Law of Moses the man of God. They set the altar in its place, for fear was on them because of the peoples of the lands, and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening.

4. God's people need to prepare for and expect **opposition**.

Ezra 4:4-5 – *Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.*

5. The church needs **trained leaders** who have a heart for God and His Word.

Ezra 7:6 – *He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.*

6. Disciple-making involves **information**, **transformation**, and **proclamation**.

Ezra 7:10 – *For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.*

7. The sustainability of the church's ministry requires **leadership** development.

Ezra 7:27-28 – *Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the Lord my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.*

8. **Fasting** remains a wise spiritual practice for God's people.

Ezra 8:21-23 – *Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.*

9. The Holy Spirit **convicts** people of sin that leads to confession and revival.

Ezra 9:5-6 – *And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, saying: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.*

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1. God’s work requires His people to _____ at various levels.

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