

## ***Dependent Leadership***

Ezra 7 - NCBC, May 22, 2016

Main Point: **God supernaturally works through leaders who study, live, and teach His Gospel.**

**Set your heart to study the Gospel**

**Set your heart to live the Gospel**

**Set your heart to teach the Gospel**

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### **Opening Announcements:**

Prayers for Ardie & Pastor Somers

Special combined service next Sunday for our new Assoc Pastor candidate – Scott Gnuse. Service starts at **9:30a**.

<<My Savior My God>>



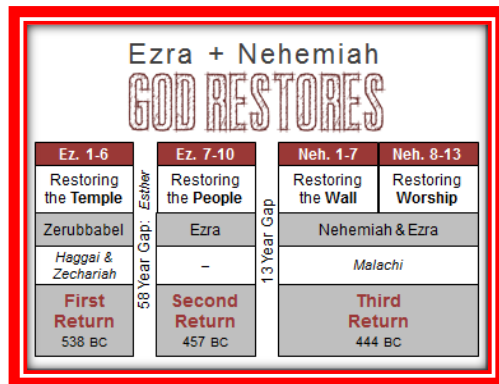
Aren't you thankful this morning that our Savior lives? Our sins are forgiven because Jesus lives! We have power to overcome sin's desire because Jesus lives! And we have a secure hope for a future of glory and eternal rest in God's very presence – all because Jesus lives. I'm so thankful that our Lord and Savior lives today.



It would be our joy to give you a Bible this morning. Just raise your hand as our ushers are coming now to make sure that you have a Bible to help you follow along this morning. If you don't have a Bible of your own, please take this Bible as our gift to you; otherwise you may return the Bible to the table in the back of the room after the service.

This morning we continue our study of God's restoring grace from Ezra-Nehemiah. You will find **Ezra chapter 7** on page **393** of the Bibles we've handed out. And today in Ezra 7 we meet the man Ezra for the first time.

Let's quickly review what we've learned from our study of Ezra-Nehemiah so far.



We've covered the first 6 chapters in Ezra. And these chapters record the first return of the Jewish exiles from Babylonian in order to rebuild the temple. Zerubbabel and Jeshua led this effort together, and even though they were sorely persecuted – God provided for His people. God sovereignly worked through Kings like Cyrus and

Darius...and God sovereignly worked through the preaching of His Word from prophets like Haggai and Zechariah to help His people accomplish His work for His greater glory.

And so by the end of chapter 6 the temple was finally completed in **515 BC**. But notice how chapter 7 begins

...

*Now after this, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia...*

It's helpful to realize that there's a 58-year gap between chapter 6 and chapter 7 of Ezra. The biblical account of Esther and Mordecai occurs during this gap...and now, in the year **457 BC** during the reign of Artaxerxes, Esther's step-son - God raises up a second group of exiles in Babylon to return to Jerusalem under the spiritual leadership of Ezra.

Ezra was an exemplary spiritual leader – a scribe, a priest, and a lover of God's Word. The first part of chapter 7 highlights selected portions of Ezra's genealogy to trace Ezra's lineage back to Aaron – the first high priest of God's people who was the brother to Moses – the first prophet of God.

So please stand in honor God's Word, as I pick up our reading **from Ezra chapter 7, verse 6**, in the English Standard translation:



... <sup>6</sup> this Ezra went up from Babylonia. 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.

<sup>7</sup> And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants. <sup>8</sup> And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. <sup>9</sup> For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him. <sup>10</sup> 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.

For the sake of time, we'll skip over the letter of King Artaxerxes found in verses 11-26 ...and pick up reading again with Ezra's response in verse 27:

*<sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> 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.*

**This is the Word of the Lord.**

You may be seated. **Let's Pray.**

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How important is it to you that God is actively working in your life today? Be careful with your answer...consider the implications before you respond.

If your life was a sailboat... and God's Spirit was the wind... how important is God's active work in your daily life?

The hand of God was with Ezra. 3 times in this chapter – verses **6, 9, and 28**... the Scriptures say that the hand of the Lord his God was on Ezra.

What does this mean? The hand of the Lord refers to God's active power and protective provision for His people. It's a saying that refers to God's supernatural work in the lives of people. The hand of God refers to God's blessing, God's favor, and God's supernatural work in your life.

So **young students** – how important is it for you to have God's supernatural favor upon your life? **Parents** – how important is it that God does more in your life than what human effort can produce or expect? **Christian** – how important is it to you to be someone who is legitimately blessed by God?

Ezra was a man who was greatly blessed by God, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him. In verses 1-5 we see that Ezra was blessed with a godly priestly heritage. In verses 7-9 we observe God provided safe passage of Ezra and the returnees over the 900 miles to Jerusalem.

And then notice **verse 6** where we find a statement that could never be explained by any human effort or expectation,

*...the king granted Ezra all that he asked.*

God's good hand on Ezra	
"the king granted him all that he asked" (7:6)	
7:11-13	Peace & freedom for any to return
7:14,25	Go spiritually restore Jerusalem
7:15-20	Take offerings from King & Jews
7:21-23	Generous provision from treasury
7:24	Exemption from all taxes
7:25-26	Go set up judicial theocracy

As we keep reading this chapter it becomes very evident that God was providentially working with His strong hand in Ezra's life. In verse 11-13, the unbelieving Artaxerxes

who calls himself the King of all kings actually makes a decree allowing any of the Jews in Persia to return with Ezra back to Jerusalem. Verse 14 makes it clear – Ezra is being sent back by the King for the purpose of spiritually restoring the people. Over 80 years had passed since God used King Cyrus to send the first returnees back to rebuild the temple. Now the temple was restored and in operation, but the people's hearts were far from God. So God stirred up King Artaxerxes to send a delegation back to restore the people.

Verses 15-20 detail the significant offerings that the Persian court, along with the Jewish people had provided to assist with the sacrifices and offerings back in Jerusalem. Then as if the donated silver and gold was not enough, King Artaxerxes decrees that the royal treasuries of the Judean providence should provide whatever Ezra requests. This is incredible supernatural provision. In verse 24 the King makes sure his governors understand that servants of God's temple in Jerusalem are not subject to any tolls or taxation, and then he ends his letter by commanding Ezra to appoint spiritual leadership over the territory, and legislate the laws of God in the region.

Wow. Certainly the King's favor towards Ezra was beyond what they could have ever asked or imagined. And the explanation in the text is just, *for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.*

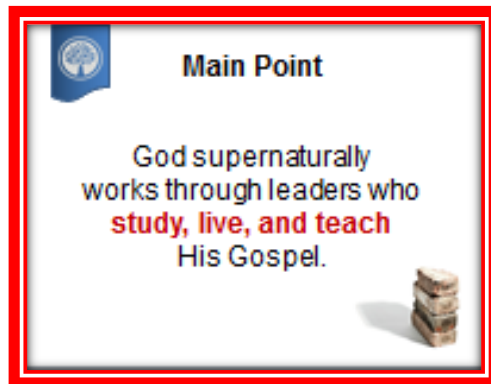
Loved ones – do you long to have your sails filled with the Spirit of God like Ezra? Do you long to be a ready instrument in the sovereign hand of God for Him to use

for His greater glory in this world? If so, I invite you to observe carefully the truth of Ezra 7 this morning. For this chapter reveals a key reason for Ezra's participation in God's supernatural ministry.

The hand of God was on Ezra because... verse 10...

*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.*

This is worth thinking more about.



God supernaturally works through leaders who study, live, and teach His Gospel.

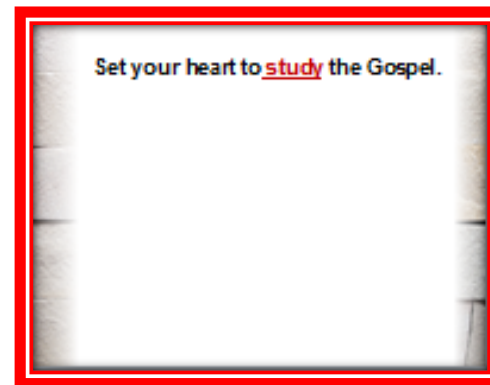
8 times in this chapter, Ezra is directly connected with God's Word. Ezra was a Psalms 1 man, "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord."

Before Ezra, the Jewish scriptures only consisted of the 5 books of Moses – the Pentateuch. And Ezra was faithfully committed to studying, practicing, and teaching

God's Word. So likewise today – God blesses leaders who intentionally seek to study, live, and teach the fully revelation of Jesus Christ as we now have it in the Gospel. The hand of God follows after hearts who love His Word.

So let's unpack what this means for all of us this morning, as we desire God to supernaturally work through our lives for His greater glory in this world.

First, since God supernaturally works through leaders who study, live, and teach His Gospel, today you are invited to:



Set your heart to study the Gospel

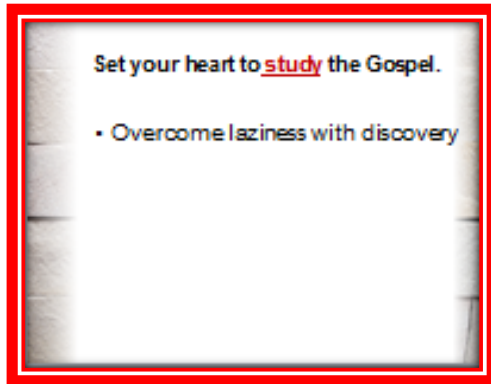
Is your heart like Ezra's – the man upon whom God's hand rested?

Ezra's heart was firmly set, like a compass, on the true North of God's Word. To set your heart means to be intentional. To be committed. To have the settled focus

of your life upon the revelation of Jesus Christ through the Gospel.

Would you seek the active work of God in your life, relationships, and ministry?

Then set your heart to study.



Study? That's hard work! I thought I was done with studying when I graduated school. You really expect me to study God's Word?

Church - you must overcome laziness with the joy of discovery.

Do you like to hike? Or snorkel? Or go caving? All of these take a lot of energy and effort. But the joy of discovery keeps you walking. The joy of exploring what's behind that next coral reef keeps you swimming. The joy of discovery overcomes laziness and gets you into the harness and into the cave.

I remember our family wanted to swim out to explore a coral reef about 80 yards from the beach. Jody and I were swimming, and pulling the kids in a small inflatable boat as we worked against the current and started out into dark deep water. But on that day – we never found the reef! From the beach we could see it in the water. We knew it was there. But once we jumped in, we worked and worked and swam and swam – overcoming laziness with the hopeful joy of discovery...only to exit the ocean an hour later without ever having found the reef!

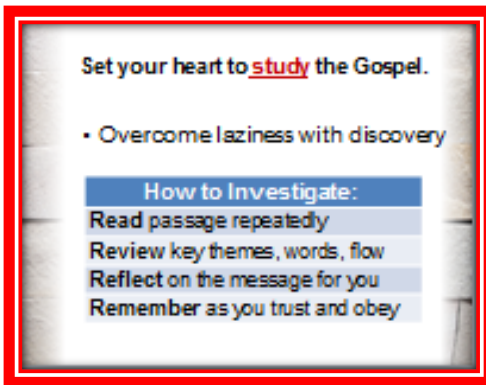
Sometimes this happens in Bible Study too. So here's the point. If you are going to set your heart to study the Gospel...you must love the Gospel. And when you love God's Word, you will open it like a treasure map – like a hidden coral reef or an unexplored cavern under the earth.

Verse 6 says that Ezra was *skilled in the Law of Moses*. Verse 11 says *he was learned in matters of the commandments of the Lord and his statutes for Israel*.

Such understanding and biblical competency requires hard work. Diligent effort. A committed love. And the joy of discovery will continue to beckon you from your Lazy Boy and bed.

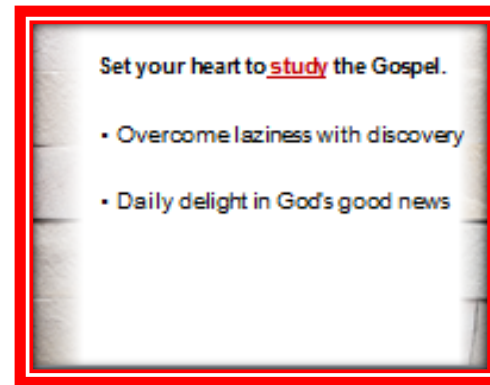
But what does it mean to study the Gospel? What skills must you develop in order to benefit from your time of study?





First, with a prayerful heart you must read the Scriptures. Often it is helpful to **read** a passage multiple times – in different translations – just making sure to understand what the Scripture is saying. **Review** key themes or repeated words. Review the flow of thought and ask God to help you understand what the text is saying. And then sit back for a moment and **reflect** on what God has revealed about Christ to you. Sometimes it can be helpful to jot down some thoughts or key takeaways. This time quietly thinking about the implications of God's word for your own life helps you **remember**. What is God calling you to trust Him for? What is God calling you to obey?

In short, God blesses the leader who's mind and heart is set on **daily delighting in the good news of Jesus Christ**.



You're never too old to keep learning. So as you learn and seek to better understand all that God has revealed about Himself to us – delight in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Ezra only had the law and some prophets – which pointed forward to the righteous Messiah. But we have been granted the revelation of Jesus Christ Himself – and we now have God's Spirit in us to help as well.

So don't merely study facts, figures, hermeneutics, or history. But as you read your Bible, gaze upon both the sufferings and glories of Christ. Look for the scarlet thread of God's undeserved grace towards needy sinners. And then respond with thanksgiving. Revelation always demands a response – so study and learn with a heart for confession, repentance, faith, and praise!

Ezra had set his heart to study God's law. What about you?

Luke 6:40 says that a disciple when he is fully trained will become like his master. In other words, **the heart of the leaders becomes the heart of the people.**



No wonder God supernaturally works through leaders who love His Word so much, that they set their hearts to study it.

But notice Ezra wasn't content with head knowledge that only puffs a person up. His example further calls every one of us to:



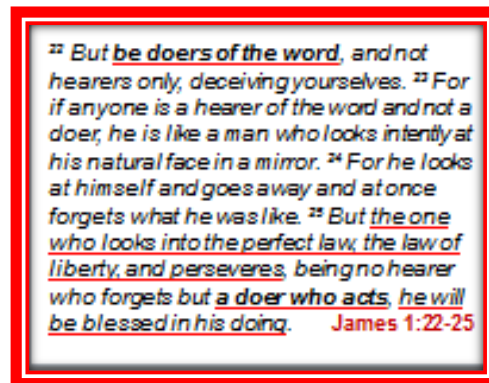
**Set your heart to live the Gospel.**

The same commitment of knowing God's will necessarily translates to doing God's will. And this is a commitment God delights to favor.

Jesus said it this way,

*If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:17)*

James writes this in **James 1:22-25**,



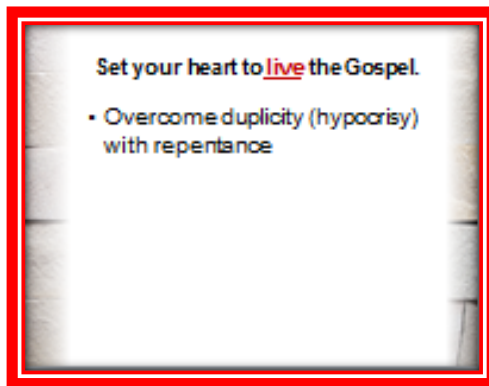
*<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*



So here's the point. Ezra knew the truth, and he lived it out first before committing to share it.

So what does it mean to really live the Gospel? To live out God's grace in our daily lives and relationships?

First, a gospel lifestyle must be a lifestyle of repentance.



In other words, we must overcome duplicity or hypocrisy of our own hearts with the greater joy of repentance.

Let me explain. If we only hear God's Word, but fail to apply it in our lives, James teaches us that we actually deceive ourselves. We become a bigger and bigger Pharisee – with all the right head knowledge, but no spiritual power or authority. Our life is compromised.

Only a lifestyle of repentance can rescue us from trying to minimize our own sin. Living in the gospel rest frees us from the pressures of judgmentalism and external perfectionism.

Living out the Gospel means that we



overcome law with grace.

Gospel pilgrims don't live by the law of *knowledge* – that God loves you based on how much you know.

Gospel pilgrims don't live by the law of *productivity* – that God loves you based on how much you can get done.

Gospel pilgrims don't live by the law of *influence* – that God loves you based on how many relationships you can maintain.

Gospel pilgrims live by God's grace. Jesus Christ has fulfilled the law for us. Grace frees you to acknowledge and confess your ignorance, your weakness, and your limitations...all the while resting in the sufficient provision of God's cleansing grace.

So here's the question for all of us today.

As you study the Gospel and come to more fully understand your own desperate need for grace... how do you respond?

Law tries harder. Law piles on the guilt. Law condemns.

But if you set your heart to live out the Gospel... then the cry of your heart will be "Grace! Grace!" You overcome by the blood of Christ! Christ finished your rescue with his final cry on Calvary's cross! The tomb is empty – and your life is marked by the power of His resurrection and His indwelling Spirit.

Are you just a hearer of God's Gospel... or are you a doer of His Gospel?

Advance warning: this next part is very convicting for your pastor, and has been known to convict others as well... but would you be interested in knowing how well you're living out God's Gospel in your daily life?



The most important test of our true theology is how we treat the people around us when they are difficult to love.

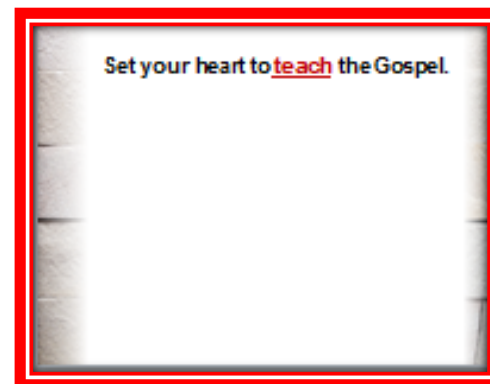
Parents – do you nod your head in agreement when the Gospel of God's grace is preached, but then lay down the law of strict behavior modification without seeking to address the underlying heart issues at home?

Spouses – do you underline the word "grace" in your Bible study but base your daily relationship with your spouse on how they have been treating you recently?

O how we need grace, and yet despise it all at the same time!

God blesses those who study His Gospel, and then seek first to live out His Gospel for His glory. And out of the pulpit of a transformed life, comes a powerful teaching ministry.

So first seek to better understand God's gospel. Next seek to better apply God's gospel. And then,



## Set your heart to teach the Gospel

Ezra wanted to teach God's statutes and rules in all of Israel. He was intentionally focused on sharing the wisdom of God and His love with all the people of God.

King Artaxerxes obviously had a lot of respect and trust for Ezra to appoint him as the Department Chair of Jewish Studies at the Persian U. God's powerful hand was blessing this student of His Word who was so focused on practicing and applying whatever God taught him from his studies.

Church – a life transformed by the Gospel creates a platform for sharing and teaching others about Christ. By God's Word, grace produces a supernatural holiness and love in our hearts that is infectious and intriguing to others.

So please don't miss this point Church. All of God's people are called to seek God through the study of His Word. All of God's people are called to apply and practice the Gospel truths in growing rest, obedience, and love. And all of God's people thus made to be God's ambassadors – living testaments of grace for the world to read.

But you say, Pastor – I don't know all the answers. I get all tongue-tied when I try to tell others about how good God has been to me. Isn't that why we hire pastors in the church – so that we don't have to really teach others about God ourselves?

Dear loved ones... your fear is showing. Do you remember what the resurrected King of Kings said before He ascended up to the Father's right hand where He is even now interceding for you?

Jesus said – I am with you always – All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me – so Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Teach all the nations to observe my Gospel – all that I have commanded you. Go. Set your heart to teach.



Overcome your fears with the authority of a Spirit-powered life of obedience.

The same Spirit who has given you the victory over the sin in your own life is the same Spirit who will empower your bold witness for Christ.

So apply the Gospel in the joy of repentance and faith – and then open your mouth to influence your world with hope and hope in the name of Jesus Christ.



Use every opportunity that God gives you to share the good news of Christ with others.

If your heart is set in this way to teach God's Gospel to others – you'll be proactive, not just reactive. For example, think about what would happen this week if you started every morning praying that God would give you an opportunity to tell someone about how deceptive sin's lies are, and how good God's grace is through Jesus Christ. If your heart was set to teach the Gospel every day this week... and your heart was set to teach the Gospel every day this week....and my heart was united in this focus...how do you think God's hand would supernaturally move through our church family this week within our community?

Elders, pastors, and deacons – God wants us to model such a lifestyle for the rest of the flock. Of course the responsibility is not ours alone, for God has placed His Spirit in every one of His children...but leaders have much to learn from Ezra's example.



For God supernaturally works through leaders who study, live, and teach His Gospel.

This is the life God delights to bless.

So once again I will ask you, how important is it to you that God is actively working in your life today? God's powerful hand actively blesses those who follow Ezra's example.

So prioritize your Bible study. Connect with a Bible study or a Life group. Give your best time and efforts to knowing Christ and His grace through the Word. His love letter is waiting for you to open it, and delight in it day and night.

And then as you learn...expect God's grace to lead you deeper into the joys of love and personal holiness. Stay humble and soft, and eager to change and grow more and more into the character of Jesus Christ.

All so that God will receive the greater glory as you take advantage of every opportunity He brings you to show and tell others how good and sufficient our living Savior truly is.

The last 2 verses in chapter 7 provide testimony of the results of such a Word-saturated life – Ezra **praises** God for His sovereign grace that would do so much more than he could ever ask or imagine through a pagan King...and he **courageously** steps out in faith to accomplish even greater ministry by the power of God's good hand.

May such outcomes be the experience of God's people here at New Castle Bible Church as we dependently and humbly set our hearts to study, live, and teach God's Gospel together.



Let's pray. **Closing prayer.**

<<Take my life and let it be>>

**Next Sunday Combined Service – 9:30am**

Benediction:

*<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

*Hebrews 13:20-21*