

City of God Part 10 - “**Journey of Faith**” (6-28-26)

**Introduction:** Reminder of Key Themes, Review Series so far, then introduce today’s topic

**Key Themes**

- **Temple** (Where God meets with us) - embracing what God is building and doing now, let go of expectations
- **People** (Who we are as God’s people) - coming out from another culture that we are too intertwined with
- **City** (How we live as the people of God) - set apart, invite the people around us, but oppose the culture

**Timeline: Return from Exile and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem came in 3 waves (approx. 100yrs)**

- **Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6):** 1st wave of exiles return, rebuild the altar, lay foundation, and rebuild temple
- **Ezra (Ezra 7-10):** 2nd wave of exiles, Ezra brings reforms, fasting, repenting, and re-dedicating the people
- **Nehemiah (with Ezra):** 3rd wave of exiles, rebuilding of the Wall, the reading of the Law, further reforms

**Last Week:** Ezra 7 - Ezra called to Jerusalem & start of 2nd wave of exiles

**Today’s Text:** Ezra chapter 8

- **Journey to Jerusalem** - Journey of Faith (Risk!) thru Preparation, Prayer, Fasting (4 month journey)

**1) Preparation**

**Ezra 8:15-17 (ESV)**

[15] I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the sons of Levi. [16] Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, **leading men**, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were **men of insight**, [17] and sent them to Iddo, **the leading man** at the place Casiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his brothers and the temple servants at the place Casiphia, namely, to send us ministers for the house of our God.

**Note:** Ezra pauses with these leaders to evaluate and make final preparations. They notice they are missing a vital component. So he chooses some men to go on their behalf to recruit . . .

- **Leading men - The Head, chief, first, top** (ultimately Jesus “chief Cornerstone Psalm 118)  
  - \***Creation** - “in the beginning” (in or from the head)
- **Men of Insight** - (verb) this is the act of considering or discerning in order to understand. It can also be used to describe the act of teaching in order to help others to discern or understand something.
- **First use of this word is Pharaoh describing Joseph in Egypt . . .**

**Genesis 41:37-40a (ESV)**

[38] And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” [39] Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are. [40] You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command.

- Also used when Moses was delegating authority. It was used as the marker for choose leaders (Deut. 1:13)
- Ezra walked in this. It’s how he was preparing for this journey (vs. 15) - “I reviewed the people and priests”

So, these **Leaders** and men of **Insight** are sent to seek additional help from the Levites (priestly leaders) . . .

**Ezra 8:18-20 (ESV)**

[18] And by **the good hand of our God on us**, they brought us a **man of discretion**, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely **Sherebiah** with his sons and kinsmen, 18; [19] also **Hashabiah**, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, with his kinsmen and their sons, 20; [20] besides 220 of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name.

**Note: They bring back a “man of discretion”**

**Discretion** - (noun) describes someone with discernment or understanding, intelligence, and good sense.

This intelligence is more than just mere book knowledge or learning about a particular subject.

It has a greater significance and means insight or understanding.

**Discernment** - This is both a spiritual gift, and a skill to be practiced and developed.

They used both the wisdom God had given them to discern other good leaders to join them, but also they relied ultimately on the Lord's provision (vs 18) - “by the good hand of our God on us”

**Application:** Just because God has called us on a Journey of Faith, doesn't mean we just launch out unprepared. There is a place for careful consideration and collaborating with others, in order to understand and prepare for the journey ahead.

**Special Notes:** Far too often we associate faith, with a blind, unprepared, launching into something. We get a wild hair, or maybe even hear from God, but then just take off! The Bible has a different word for that. It's not faith its foolishness. And some of the harshest words in scripture are reserved for the “fool.”

## 2) Prayer and Fasting

**So now they are organized, and have a team of wise and respected leaders. Time to go, right?**

**Ezra 8:21 (ESV)**

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.

**Note:** Ezra didn't rely on their planning and strategy alone. Those of “understanding,” should realize how little we actually understand, and how little we can control.

So, we do our planning and discerning, but ultimately we humble ourselves before God, seeking his help and relying on Him alone!

**Ezra 8:22-23 (ESV)**

[22] 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.” [23] So **we fasted and implored our God** for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

**Note:** While they went with the blessing and support of the foreign king, they refused to rely on him for help and protection. Whether we are well supported or not, our trust should remain fully on the Lord.

**Fasting** plays a huge part in this - in that place of denial and hunger, we hunger more for the Lord, and for His presence, protection, wisdom and provision.

**John Wesley on Fasting** - “Some have exalted religious fasting beyond all scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it.”

**Andrew Murray** (from his book “With Christ in the school of prayer”) - “Prayer needs fasting for its full growth. Prayer is the one hand with which we grasp the invisible. Fasting is the other hand, the one with which we let go of the visible.”

We should consider having fasting as a part of our lives - there are times for this individually and corporately

When setting out on a Journey of Faith, we should strongly consider this spiritual practice. Additional Notes for guidance on fasting at the end of the sermon notes we will post online.

**Note:** Ezra wanted to make sure that they sought the Lord for help and protection, trusting in him alone, more than the provision of the foreign king, and more than their own well-made plans!

**Application:** When stepping out in faith, we need to be aware of the equal and opposite temptations:

- to plunge ahead alone, unthoughtful, and unprepared
- to rely too heavily on our own wisdom, and the help of man (my plans are in order, my funds are in order)

We prepare, and then ultimately we rely upon the Lord.

### 3) The Plan and the Journey

#### **Ezra 8:24-25, 28-30 (ESV)**

[24] Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: **Sherebiah, Hashabiah**, and ten of their kinsmen with them. [25] And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king and his counselors and his lords and all Israel there present had offered. . . [28] And I said to them, “You are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your fathers. [29] **Guard them and keep them** until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of fathers' houses in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the LORD.” [30] **So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God.**

**Note:** They shared responsibility among trusted men, diversified the risk, and also had a plan for accounting.

#### **Ezra 8:31 (ESV)**

Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way.

**Note:** They didn't completely avoid the enemy, but they were delivered by God from the enemy, even the “ambushes” along the way!

#### **Ezra 8:32-33a, 34 (ESV)**

[32] We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days. [33] On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed . . . [34] The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded.

**Note:** They faithfully completed the task.

#### **Ezra 8:35-36 (ESV)**

[35] At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the LORD. [36] They also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps and to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and they aided the people and the house of God.

**Note:** Then they worshipped sacrificially, and then got to the work the Lord has called them to.

**Conclusion:** Prepare, Pray and Fast, then trust God on the Journey. Worshipping Him all along the way!

## Extra Notes: Guidance for Fasting

### a) Spiritual Tips for Fasting

- **Purpose of Fasting** - special credit to **Richard Foster** "Celebration of Discipline" (notes from pg. 54-56)

**Primary:** Focused & Centered on God – God-focused, initiated, & ordained, searching for Him with no other objective to manipulate or control, just a desire to seek Him & find Him & center on Him.

#### **Secondary Benefits:**

- Reveals the things that control us – brings sins to the surface
- Reminds us how we are sustained – we feast on the Word during this time

**Jentezen Franklin** from his book "Fasting" (pg. 56)

"Fasting is not just a physical discipline, it can be a spiritual feast. Once you "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8), your hunger for more of His presence eclipses the limitation of your understanding."

- Increased concentration & effectiveness in prayer
- Guidance in decisions, Revelation from God, etc.
- Deliverance from bondage, Physical healing & well-being
- Revival in the church

**Remember** - God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him!

### • **Warnings & Wrong Motives in Fasting**

**Richard Foster** (from his book: "Celebration of Discipline" pg. 47 & 49)

"Whenever there is a form devoid of spiritual power, law will take over because law always carries with it a sense of security and manipulative power. Biblical fasting always centers on spiritual purposes."

- **Not a tool to manipulate God** - We are not manipulating God thru our work, fasting breaks you & helps you grow in faith. We are not "twisting God's arm" when we fast. We are not going to make him do anything He does not want to do (maybe compare David & Ahab). What we are doing is positioning ourselves & preparing our hearts for what is to come.
- **Not to obtain merit or get sins forgiven** – Jesus blood cleanses us. However, fasting can raise our awareness of our sins & bring them to the surface so we can repent.
- **Fasting is not a Christian diet** – if you are just doing it to lose weight, that's just starving yourself. A fast centers on prayer, worship, & the Word.
- **Do not fast to be noticed by others** - Do it privately, not drawing attention to yourself. (Jesus talks about this in Matt. 6:16-18) There are corporate fasts, but even then don't make a show of your self.

## b) Practical Tips for Fasting

- **Have a clear goal for the Fast**
- **Prepare spiritually** (see previous section on spiritual tips) – repent, forgive, etc.
- **Decide what to Fast** (now review types of Fasts)

**Partial Fast** (example: Daniel 10): fruits & veggies only (no meat, sweets, breads) water only

**Normal Fast:** water only (this can last up to 40 days), consider health: pregnant, diabetic, etc.

**Absolute Fast:** only for short periods (1-3 days), depending on your health, consult medical

**Specific Fast:** giving up a specific food, drink, or activity for a period of time

- **Decide how long to Fast** - beginners work your way up, try 1 day every so often, then build to a 3 days, etc.

**1 day** (skip 2-3 meals) – good idea to go lunch to lunch

**3 days**

**21 days** (Daniel model – partial fast)

**40 days** (Jesus model & others)

- **What to expect during a Fast**

Don't stock up before a fast, especially a longer one. In fact beginning to taper off leading up to a long fast is wise. You can expect headaches, irritability, hunger pains. Your body is probably having withdrawals from caffeine & sugar! Your body is detoxifying if you are going for several days. Get lots of rest & exercise more moderately. You may feel weakness or dizziness – especial with sudden adjustments in position. Be careful, move slowly, but hang in there!

- **How to end a Fast**

Don't over eat, especially the longer the fast, your stomach has shrunk, build back up to eating slowly – small portions and snacks.