

COMING HOME

A STUDY OF EZRA



EZRA COMING HOME: PROBLEM SOLVING AND SOLUTIONS

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Ezra 9:1-7, 10:1-4

The book of Ezra is rarely taught and almost never taught verse by verse. Few miracles happen, few notable figures emerge, and yet it is integral to God's unfolding narrative and rescue plan for his people. Join Doxa as we unpack the physical and spiritual rebuilding that happens in the Old Testament book of Ezra. For more information about our gatherings and how we make disciples in the everyday stuff of life, go to doxa-church.com or find us on Instagram @doxa. Ezra chapter 9 verses 1 through 7 and chapter 10 verses 1 through 4.

"After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, 'The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.' As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and my beard and sat appalled. Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. 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: 'Oh 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. From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt. And for our iniquities we, our

kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as it is today."

Chapter 10.

"While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel for the people wept bitterly. And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra: 'We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law. Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.'" This is the word of the Lord. You can be seated.

Well, what did you read? That wasn't the text. Just kidding. I was planning that one all week. <Laugh> Hey, you will absolutely need a Bible today. So if you've got a Bible, please pull it out. We'll have some of the scriptures up, up at the, on the screens, but you also might wanna look at using a Bible app, if you don't. We're gonna bounce around a bunch in Ezra 9 and 10. For those of you that don't know me, my name's Eddie, I'm the lead teaching pastor here. And I have the privilege of preaching each week. It's a great honor, but for now, for something this heavy, we're going to have to get into the weeds a little bit. And honestly, this text includes a lot of different things. Things like greed, fear, divorce, widows, orphans, child sacrifice, and weirdly, intermarrying in between races.

So it's quite a bit here. So if you've got little ones in the room, this is absolutely going to be, as it's gonna be accessible, there's not gonna be anything they can't hear, but just be, just understand. There's a lot of unusual stuff going on here that I'm gonna have to address. And so if you'd rather check 'em into the kids, please feel free to do that. Okay. Let me pray over us, we're gonna need it, and we'll get after it.

Lord Jesus, we ask that you as a king, be present with us, that you would reign and rule over a sermon like this, in its drama and its struggle. And as we end the book of Ezra, Lord God, with so many question marks, Lord God, you are a God of clarity. You are a God of firmness. Of clear answers. Of foundation. And so Lord, I pray that you would reign in that here today. Would you fill this place with the Spirit? Would you protect me, Lord God, as I preach a hard word? And would you open the hearts and minds of my friends here that they can hear from you and not from themselves, not from someone, a neighbor, not from their own heart, but Lord directly from you, the God of peace? We love you. We praise you. In his name. Amen.

Okay. Has anyone here, I know people here have bought the big boxes of cereal from Costco? You know what I'm talking about? Like not the ones with like two boxes stapled together, but the ones with like two bags in there, you know what I'm talking about? Yeah. We do that all the time and kids are quite, you know, when they try to open these boxes, they're a little smaller,

right? Cause they're so big. And especially for a five year old, right? Well, my five year old loves to wake up early and she loves to eat cereal. And so she oftentimes will go to the pantry and her favorite cereal is one of those boxes. It says double boxes, double bags, and it's a daunting task for a five year old to carry one of those, let alone open a bag, but somehow she managed to tear this thing open. Okay. And on top of that, her favorite cereal is shredded wheat, they're the, you know what I'm saying? They're like these sort of large chunks of disgustingness, you know what I mean? You know what I'm talking about? I make some enemies. <Laugh> Some like 70 year old enemies, right? <laugh> Cuz no one eats those anymore. They are massive, but somehow my five year old likes it, so I was wrong. Right. So she goes in there and she gets it. And the thing about these heavy boxes is she'll grab them and she will start to pour. And like most of them miss the bowl, some of them land in it, but when she hits her fill, she can't stop turning the box over in time. So she just keeps going, keeps going, shaking it out. And boom hits the, puts it back down and her bowl is filled. Okay. Shaken, pressed down, all that stuff. You know, shaken, you know, filled to the brim and we have these giant, like no one knows why we need these bowls, but they're these massive plastic Costco bowls. And they could feed like a giant, they could feed an entire family in them. And so the bowl she has is this size and it's filled with like seven servings of shredded wheat. So it's packed. So then she has to get milk. So she'll go in and she'll somehow scale the fridge, grab the giant jug of milk and then start pouring. And the same thing happens with the giant jug of milk. It's too heavy. It fills, fills, fills, fills. She puts it down. And then the cereal line, the milk rather is filled to the brim with all this cereal. So she's got this massive bowl, okay. This is a massive undertaking for a five year old. And then she's gotta get this to her seat. So then what she does is she like has two hands and she'll like scale, you know, walk really carefully holding this massive bowl all the way to the kitchen table. And then she gets it there. And then it's breakfast time. It's great. It's great. The only problem is five year olds as you notice, they don't eat all that fast. And so she'll sit there for 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 minutes sort of gnawing away at this cereal. And they also not only do they not eat that fast, they don't eat that much. And so what she's done after an hour of whatever she was doing, the shredded wheat, because it's so yummy, is just this pool of like, it looked like oatmeal. It's this big watery mess in this bowl. And she's had all of four bites out of this giant bowl of cereal. And so now her next goal, her next goal is to get this bowl back to the sink, which is a massive undertaking of course. And so same process, this time a little more liquidy, she's carrying this thing. And then one time, this is just a couple days ago, I walked down the stairs and I get a peak of what's going on. And I'm like, is she, okay, she's putting her, she's putting the cereal away. Praise God. Like that's a start, right? She's on her way back to the sink to like figure out what to do with this bowl. And so I peek back upstairs. I'm like, that's not a big deal. Come back down. She's still walking towards the sink. Very carefully trying not to spill. But then when I come down this time, she's doing some advanced stuff because not only is she not holding the bowl with two hands, she's got it with one, but she's got blanket and doll, in the other hand. <Laugh> And so now she's just walking towards the sink and I come down and I go, "Hey, babe, will you use two hands please?" And she goes, "Yes!" Drops the blanket, all over the kitchen right next to the sink, like that close. So I go, so I don't help. I go back upstairs and, and it's like, I'll deal with this in like 10 minutes. It's like, babe, grab a rag, clean up, I'll come and assess the damage. So I go do that. I come back down and she, I'm like, come back 10 minutes later, she doesn't grab a rag. She doesn't get anything to help clean. She grabs a like those half paper

towels and she is scrubbing the wheat into a circle. And now from being in this little blast radius, it has now spread 10 feet wide. As she scrubs up, the shredded wheat is all over the place, a total mess. Okay. It's a mess.

And it's such a great sermon analogy, right? Have you ever recognized a massive problem? And you knew you needed to help fix it because you caused some of it, but you made the problem worse? You ever done that? Maybe you haven't spilled your shredded wheat, but you've done something, right. Maybe you did something seriously wrong in a relationship, but your efforts to fix it made more problems with the person you're trying to solve 'em with. Maybe you made a wrong decision, but instead of fessing up to your mistake, you kept making more wrong decisions in order to clean up your past ones. And all of a sudden, you've got several in a series of bad decisions that you need to have to fix. That is the story of how we end this book in Ezra. Ezra hears about a problem with the Israelites and he tries to fix it. And boy are the results, they're mixed. They're very, very mixed. Now, if you haven't been with us for the last few weeks, I feel like I need to catch you up to just get you to the point where we're exactly at in this story. Okay? So here it is.

So God originally, he makes a promise to Israel. He told them that he's gonna be their God and that they will be his people and that he would save the world through them, by bringing a Messiah into the world, through that family line, that would one day save them from their sins. But Israel, the God's people, they got ahead of themselves and they started committing evil and all this horrible stuff, so God scatters their people. They scatter 'em throughout the foreign lands. And he does that for 70 years. But God being a good God says, I need to call them back. I remember my covenant with them. I will still bring the Messiah through them. I'm gonna call them back together and then send them back to Jerusalem to reestablish themselves as a people. And so in Ezra, we find that Israel's regathered, they go back to the promise land, where they were from, they then reestablished the temple. A couple weeks ago we saw them reestablish the law or the Torah in the land. And now we find our friend Ezra here, who's been in town all of five months and things are already going absolutely haywire. So today we're gonna attempt to answer this really important question. Okay? Just like they're trying to answer in the text. What should a community of believers do when an issue arises that threatens the life of the community? Okay. What should a community of believers do when an issue arises that threatens the life of the community and what should you do when problems arise in your life, your family, your work, your spiritual life, how do you attempt to solve more complex issues in your church and in your family, in a godly and biblical way? How do you do that? Okay. But more importantly, I think we're gonna all sort of learn that about the capital T tension of being a human being. And that's this, our outcomes, no matter how long we try to solve problems, they're murky. They're very murky. No matter how hard we try, no matter how skilled our attempts are to solve problems, we are never 100% successful. There's always a measure of a little bit of pain or a little bit of loss or a little bit of compromise somewhere. Always. And wouldn't it be nice if there was a permanent solution to all that murkiness? Wouldn't that be great. We might learn a little bit about that as well. Okay. So how do we go about solving these big issues? Three things. Let's learn about our first one in chapter nine verses one and two. Okay.

"After these things had been done, the officials approached me," that's Ezra, approached Ezra, "and said, quote, 'The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.'"

Yikes. <Laugh> So there's a problem. Okay. And here's what they perceive the problem is. Many of the Israelites have taken foreign wives, thus in their minds, in the minds of the officials and of Ezra, they have compromised their ability to remain essentially separated or set apart. Now, remember, Israel was told by God to remain holy and set apart from the nations. Why? Because God's promise was always through Israel to bring the Messiah through this place as a way to save the world. So they were supposed to remain set apart. That's what the word holy means. It means set apart. The reason why, as an example to the outside world and as an opportunity to be missional, to bring the Messiah through so that the world would one day be saved through them. And also as an opportunity to continue to worship God in a pure way. Okay. So Ezra recognizes the problem, right? And this is the thing that we have to understand is our first goal when solving problems, it's this, properly identify what the problem is. Okay. Properly identify. When you're gonna be solving problems in your community in your life. You gotta make sure you properly do it. So Ezra, he id's the problem, right? He identifies it, but does he do it properly? Does he do it properly? And okay, this is where things get a little complex. Okay. We are covering 9 and 10 today. We only read chunks of both of these, which is why I said, you'll need your scripture. Things get complex. Okay. In the next few verses, which I'm not gonna read, Ezra gets really emotional. He laments, he gets depressed. He's laying out because he had heard that they've fallen away by marrying these other women. And then he attempts to do some theological application from the Torah, from the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses there. Okay. So he is gonna attempt to take something from those books and apply it to what's happening to him. Okay. This is where we can learn that back in verse one, check this out. It'll be up there.

"The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves." Listen up carefully, "from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites." Now this word "from" is a little confusing here in the English standard version, this word from actually means like, like the Canaanites or similar to the Canaanites. Okay. So they have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with their abominations that are similar to the Canaanites. Okay. So then Ezra paraphrases, some of what, some of the Torah in his lament to God right after this, cuz God, he's gonna get on his knees. He's gonna scream. "God, why have we intermarried with these people? We have fallen away." And he's really referencing a text that Moses wrote in Deuteronomy chapter seven. Okay. Pay attention. Listen to this. It says this, this is back in Moses's day.

"You shall not intermarry with them," the Canaanites, okay, "giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly."

Seems pretty straightforward. Now, if you're probably wondering like, what race is Eddie? Like, that's a good guess. Right? Like a lot of people, I get a lot of different stuff. It depends where what time of year, depends where I'm at. Okay. I'm sort of a product of a few different races commingling. Nearly everyone in here is. This feels a little problematic. Okay. So what do we do with that? The issue is that God sends this decree down to Moses in regards to whom? The Canaanites, okay. Question. Are the people of the land that live at the time of Ezra in chapter nine, are they Canaanites? No, they are not Canaanites. Okay. Now, if you don't know who the Canaanites are, the Canaanites were wicked and vile people. Perhaps the most wicked people group in all of scripture, many of the things they do I can't say here, cuz there are children present, but just put the words, child sacrifice and horrendous and wicked and idolatrous all sort of together and then imagine some horrible movie you've seen. That's what they do. It is absolutely bad, grotesque, and violent. So this text in Deuteronomy, does it exactly apply to what Ezra's doing here? That's the question. One commentator says that Ezra's doing what he'll call interpretive extension, trying to make this part of the Torah fit what's happening in Ezra chapter nine. Okay. It's a lot of complicated stuff here. He's looking back at the Bible, or at the Torah. He's reading and going. Hmm. That scenario happened there. Our scenario must be the same. Therefore let's do what they did. Okay. But there's another huge problem with all of this. Look back in the first part of verse two, check this out.

"For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands."

Holy race. What? Question. Has God told, in earlier parts of the Old Testament, Israel to remain ethnically pure? No, he has not. God has not told Israel to remain ethnically pure. Now God does tell Israel to remain holy and set apart, to be a holy people of God. Now, another question, is there a difference between a holy race and a holy people? Yeah, there absolutely is. This is why when solving problems, we need to properly identify the problem. You see, Ezra only gets part of his problem solving correctly. They knew they needed to be holy and set apart from the nations, but there was never this agenda to preserve a holy race, but to preserve a holy people of God. And this, by the way, okay, lemme just sidebar here for a second. I had a lot of conversations with people about this this week, a ton. And everyone had many sticking points around this point. And usually the sticking point starts with the word, but, but I mean, they are supposed to be holy and set apart and they are reading the Old Testament and so therefore dot, dot, dot dot. And I think it's really curious how our brains immediately go to yeah. If the Bible says it, it's fine. Right. But there is a difference between descriptive texts and prescriptive texts. Maybe you've heard that. If something's describing a situation, it doesn't mean it's prescribed to you to live for your own life. Okay. There's a huge difference. So let's continue. And I think I'll hopefully relieve some more tensions that you have. Okay.

This leads us to the next step in solving problems for our life or for in the church. And that's once you properly identify the problem, you've got to attempt to solve it. Not rocket science. Let's try to solve this thing. Now, how does Ezra and the officials attempt to try to fix this mess? Look at chapter 10, verse one.

Ezra, or "While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children, gathered to him out of Israel, for the people wept bitterly."

Now for all of the stuff that we like to pick on Bible characters for, Ezra gets this part perfect. He confesses his sins on behalf of himself and on behalf of Israel. This confession and this lament for you and for me, they are absolutely great parts and great starts towards reconciling with God. Okay? We absolutely should do this if we sin. And this is really important. And you might think, is this a divergent? Well, it's important because even though with what Ezra and his people are dealing with in this moment ends in a lot of murkiness and blurred lines, it's important to know that Ezra and the officials, they're really genuine in their desires to solve the problem. They actually are trying their best. They're reading the Torah. They're trying to apply it to their current situation. They're repenting. They genuinely want change. The repentance in their heart for change is good and honorable, but even so that doesn't mean that our good intentions automatically lead to good outcomes. It doesn't mean that. So Ezra confesses and he repents, but then he wants to make restitution by sort of solving this issue. Okay. And look at verse two in chapter 10.

"And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, of the sons of Elam, addressed Ezra saying, quote: 'We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.' Oh, that's funny. "Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to" what? "The Law." So what's Ezra and the officials who, what's his name here? Geez. Shecaniah. What's their, what's their solve? Their solve is divorce. Divorce. So they must separate. I mean, obviously there's a lot going on here. They gotta separate from these women to solve the problem, right? That's what they gotta do because obviously in their minds, after looking over the law, they believe they needed to preserve the holy race of Israel and make sure they divorce these women, according to what Deuteronomy says, right? But again, did they properly identify the problem? Is that the problem? That the race of holy Israel needs to be preserved? Is that the problem? You afraid to say it? It's not. The problem is not the holy race of Israel needing to be preserved, the problem was that Israel was worshiping the gods of these women and they're becoming idolators. That's what got them into exile in the first place. That's the problem. So this inter-marrying was not so much racial. It wasn't about mixing blood. It was more about mixing ideas, religions, and worldviews through this idea of marriage. Are you, are you following me? Okay. Does divorce solve that problem? No, it doesn't. You can worship a false God and be married to someone of the same religion, as an Israelite. You could be married to an Israelite and worship a false God. Happened all the time. You ever heard of the golden calf? That was their ancestors. They did it. Next question. Does the Old Testament

again, does the Old Testament law say you should never marry outside of ethnic Israel? Does it say that? No. It does not say that. Can you think of any prominent Old Testament figures that were married to non-Israelites? Can you think of any? Moses. Moses. Joseph, the son of Jacob, whose name is Israel. Pretty prominent figures. Moses wrote Deuteronomy, or at least helped compile it. So what's going on here? Does the Bible say, does the Old Testament say you should never marry those outside of ethnic Israel? Does it say that? It does not. The problem was not who they married, it was their worship. Now, perhaps if you're still not convinced, maybe some of you aren't cuz you're Bible scholars and good for you. I'm trying. <Laugh> Perhaps the most prominent example of this is Ruth. Does anyone here know the story of Ruth? Ruth is a Moabite woman. Ruth is not an Israelite. She's not. She marries into Israel through her husband Boaz and becomes King David's great, great grandmother. That's quite the story. In fact, if you read Matthew chapter one, if you want a little homework, there are five women included in that genealogy, five women. First of all, that's crazy that they include women in a genealogy. Never happened, but that's the character of our God. Second, four of those women are Gentiles. They're not Israelites. Rahab, Tamar, Ruth, Bathsheba also married to a prominent figure in the Bible. Okay? Ruth says to Naomi, her mother-in-law, your people will be my people and your God will be my God. She worships the God of Israel. So are we saying here that ethnic, you need to stay and to, to withhold and keep holy the holy race of Israel? Is that something God has decreed? No, it's not. Furthermore, divorce. <Laugh> Also a hot button issue going on here. Race and divorce. Great, great sermon. <Laugh>.

Is divorce a good thing? Should it be the solution? On one hand, you can't blame Ezra in Israel, right? And the people of Israel, because they're trying to apply Deuteronomy to their current situation. They're absolutely doing their best. But on the other hand, we sort of know the character of God. And we do have this sort of, we have the perspective to know that all across scripture, divorce is never the plan for what God is calling us to. And you might think, well, that's unfair. You know, they didn't have Jesus around to tell them and to show them and give them the Holy Spirit that they would understand that divorce was wrong. And you're right. But they did have some other prophets that lived amongst them. One of them lived real close to them and wrote his book mostly to the post-exilic people of God, his name's Malachi. Okay. And I don't have it up here, but I do wanna read this to you. Pay attention to how Malachi, living amongst Israel in this very moment, how he would address what's going on.

"And this is the second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering and accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, why does he not? Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one?" Weird, oh wow. That language there in the Old Testament, I thought they were all polygamous. "Did he not make them one with a portion of the spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth, for the man who does not love his wife, but divorces her says the Lord, the God of Israel covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in spirit and do not be faithless."

Okay. It was clear how God felt about divorce. Jesus says Moses gave divorce to the Israelites for their hardness of heart. Not because they were so great and needed a way to manage their relationships, because they had hardened hearts. Okay. Okay. Now, when coming across sticky parts of the Bible, especially in regards to things like, like divorce and all these things, it's always helpful to let other scripture inform the scripture that feels unclear. Cuz the Bible's one story, collective authors, but written by one spiritual author. Right? And so we can always go to these other books to then help us understand it. Now in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians chapter 7, 1 Peter 3, talk about divorce. And they do not tell the people who are in marriages, who are married to people of other religions to get divorced, but rather they actually encourage, those passages encourage people to stick through the marriage where people are not a follower of the true God so that in their perseverance, your godly lifestyle would actually help them become saved. Now we're not saying marry someone on purpose who is not a Christian and then try to fix them. What we're saying is if you find yourself in a marriage like that, where you either become a Christian or you're just growing in your faith and you sense that, don't get divorced because you're not a Christian, God doesn't like that. Okay? Divorce. Race.

Okay. Here's what we need to do: Properly identify the problem. Properly identify the problem. Attempt to solve the problem with repentance and reconciliation. But there is one last thing that we have to do. And we learn about it a little bit in chapter 10, verse 10. Read with me. It says,

"And Ezra the priest stood up and said to them," to the Israelites, "you have broken faith and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. Now then make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.' Then they all assembled answered with a loud voice, 'It is so, we must do as you have said.'"

Okay, did they go through with it? Did they, did they go through with the divorces? Did they? Yeah, they did, right. Question to you? Was that a good result? Was it? No. Yes. Maybe. I don't know. Too much. Not enough. Exactly. It's sort of like, is that the right thing? Like there's the point of this is that who was right? Who was wrong? They were doing the best they could. They were trying, right. It's murky. Now you might say, well, listen, I know, I don't know who is right or wrong, but I know this wasn't good for the women. This wasn't good for the women and the children they divorced. I agree. A little context. It's likely that these men, these Israelites who married foreign women, divorced other wives with other kids and married new women and had more kids. And the reason why they did that was for economic reasons because they were new to the land, and they needed land, and so they married in and hopefully they can give some of those resources back to this family. Now you tell me what the heck is going on here. Who's right? Wrong? The point is the outcome's really blurred. Ezra and the officials are really, really trying to make a good decision here. They couldn't do it. And this brings us to our final point. And this is the most important point. Use murky outcomes as longings for a better future. In your life you're gonna make decisions, okay? Decisions to move, to marry, to take a job, to break off a difficult relationship, or even manage a conflict. And often those outcomes will not be black and white. They will not be black and white. Again, everyone here in Ezra has good

intentions and the result is a just massive mixed bag, but that's kind of life isn't it? You've lived, you've been around a long time, right? Life kind of is blurred lines. It's sort of difficult to manage the sort of outcomes of these things, right? Here's what you can do, learn to accept, and hey, I actually think this is really, really important. I mean, everything I say, I think is important, but I think this will help us a lot. Learn to accept and understand the idea of nuance. Rarely in your life you're gonna find, and actually what I find is like, I'm still relatively young, but I do realize that the younger I was, the more I am black and white, and the more I sort of know, the more I realize I don't know. Maybe you agree with that. Understand that rarely is a scenario right and wrong. Yes and no. Black and white. Unless God says it is. Unless it's absolutely clear and God calls a ball or a strike. There's a lot of nuance in this. If you don't live with the tension of nuance in your life, you're gonna make a lot of mistakes and hurt people. You're gonna be black and white, when you shouldn't have been black and white, you're gonna be yes or no, and you shouldn't have said yes or no. You're gonna call balls and strikes where the Bible doesn't call balls and strikes. And guess what? We've all already done it, haven't we? And we actually all have relationships where those are kind of on the mend because we haven't really addressed it. So who in your life do you need to call? Who deserves a phone call from you or sit down with you because you were stubborn about something that you were black and white on? Who's the person that relationships a little bit on the rocks because you haven't had that conversation with them yet? Or for the other half of us who are less confrontational, who in your life needs a phone call or a meeting because you avoided those hard conversations because you didn't want them to become too black and white? And now that relationship's broken and distant. Nuanced friends. Okay.

All right. So what happens next? Turn with me to chapter 11? Oh, there is no chapter 11. Guys. You're supposed to know that. Hey, chapter 10 ends with a list of all of the people Ezra made get divorced. That's in the Bible. Now we could read those names, like that's what it is. It ends with this big anti-climax. That's what it is. It's over. The book of Ezra's done. Were you hoping for him to send off into heaven or like some Christophany Jesus shows up as an angel and tells them I'm gonna come soon and be born of a woman. Nah, none of that happens. It's just like, get divorced from them because they're not the same race as you. The end. That's brutal. It's almost as if this book was not designed to be a standalone book. And in one small way, it is, Ezra and Nehemiah are actually one book together. But even Nehemiah ends in this dud, which tells us that the greater story of the Bible is all connected. And so to end our time together, not just today, but in this book, in this wonderful story that we've walked in over the last several weeks. I wanna leave you with three themes in Ezra that you can bring home with you. Okay? So this is, this is prior apps, maybe the most important part of the series.

Here's the first thing we learn as a theme in Ezra. Number one, our intentions must be sincere. When we are in conflict or we're dealing with other people or when we're going to God, we want to have sincere intentions. We must go to him with a sincere heart, one heart that is broken with sin because Jesus was broken by our sin. Now we could go to God like an American who is sort of sad, but has other things going and can't slow down too much to be able to really repent or we could go to him like he wants us to, with clarity. Our repentance to him must be from the heart because Jesus is a person. Our God is a person. He feels us. He wants to

experience you, friend, in a genuine way and not in a distracted or half-hearted way. Okay? That's the first thing, our intentions must be sincere. Second thing, we can learn from failed solutions to improve. We absolutely can. Your failure in a task, relationship, or situation does not have to define you. Some of you are living in a life of condemnation because of a past thing you've done. And you've said, sorry, and you've apologized, but it rules you. In Christ, you absolutely do not have to live condemned by the things that you have done. In fact, the story of Ezra is that Israel's wandering away from God, God lovingly brings them back into his midst and still commissions him because he loves them. Israel's failure and wandering away was not the end of their story. And hey, I've said this line in every sermon I've preached in Ezra so far. Judgment is never the final word for God's people. If you are in Christ, you do not have to end your life with this idea of harsh judgment. In Jesus, you get redemption and you get, which means you can actually seek to improve and grow. And that's okay. You know, improvement's not a bad thing. That sanctification and growth in your spirituality is not a bad thing. There's no shame in a desire to improve your life, to make it better, that you can actually try harder next time, because you have a gracious father who loves you, who's after you, who's come before you. And he welcomes you. Do you know that you can gain wisdom in your failures and that's okay?

Okay. Intentions must be sincere. We can learn from our failed solutions to improve. And here's the last point. Friends, we can never be the hero of our own story. We can never. Remember, everyone's intentions were honestly so upright in this. Ezra, the officials in Israel, they really cared. They were genuinely repentant. They went to the scripture, they repented, they put sack cloth in ashes. They tore their garments. It says he pulled his beard out. That's intense. He's sorry for what's going on. And he is in his scripture going, Lord, what do you want me to do? The way they fixed the problem though, was profoundly complex. Divorce was never necessarily required. And the holy race was never the problem. This is the main point of chapters nine and 10. And this is the main point of all of Ezra. You can give your all to building a temple or the Torah up or building a church family, or building your own life. And you could have great desires and great intentions to do well, but it could all not work out. And in fact, it probably won't. Why? Because of this thing called the human heart. The human heart has held us captive. The Bible says our heart is wicked above all else who could understand it. Even in our best intentions, we fall short. So we could never be our own hero. But friends that doesn't have to be depressing because there is someone who does want to be your hero. And that's the reason why a church like this exists. It's about a guy named Jesus. You see this series, we named it Coming Home. And if you're paying attention, you see the idea that Israel is coming home to Jerusalem. You think, oh, coming home. Right? That makes sense. And while we have been distracted with Israel coming home to Jerusalem, the story though has always been about God bringing all of his people, not back to Jerusalem, but all of his people back to his cosmic home in the new Jerusalem, a place where you would dwell permanently. And I'm talking to all of you. God isn't asking Israel to come home with our title, he's asking you to come home. And he is sitting there and he is saying, oh, you little orphan. You little orphan. You're out there all by yourself. And you're trying to make something in your life. You work so hard. You want that relationship so badly and you buy and you spend and you cry and you toil and you work and you scroll mindlessly and you can't pull your headphones out because man, the silence would

be deafening and you'd have to deal with the problem in your soul for what? You've been gone so long. You haven't been home in a long time. Aren't you tired? Aren't you exhausted? He's saying to us, come home. Your father has prepared a place for you where your needs are met. O little one. You don't have to go at it alone, any longer, being all out there by yourself, trying to manage your life. How much can you spend? How much can you save? How much can you invest? How much can you travel before you have to deal with the problem in your heart? Come home. I'm so sorry for all the damage that's been done to you. And I'm also sorry, he says, for all of the damage that you've done. All of the damage that we live with is this canopy over ourselves, just weighing us down like a thousand pound cloak. We just can't shake it. And so we look for little distractions to get us past it. And we use addictions as a way to get through life. Not because we want to be sinners, but because we need 'em. Come home. Jesus says in me, you're a new creation. And that, that body with shame and guilt that you wear, the old gets to pass away, gets to go away forever. So come home. You are my son. God is up there as a dad saying, you're my son. You are my daughter. I'm sick of it. Come home. I love you. I won't let you toil in this world with meaning, purpose any longer. I have your purpose right here. And it comes with a gift, but not a life that you toil with for meaning, looking for the next great thing to be a part of, the next awesome startup, to finally set yourself up with the vacation home. A life that gives you an eternity, in the presence of your father, where you find dignity, meaning, purpose, and value and worth. All of the things you're actually looking for, I have. And by the way, all those demons you run from. All those demons, those people and those spirits that want your destruction, guess what? Your enemies are my enemies. And I will crush them. And you know what I do with my enemies, I make 'em my foot stool. Little one. He's saying this, come home. Come home. I love you. I've always loved you. I long for you to be in my presence. So you're down there, scrubbing your shredded wheat in the floor. And the more you scrub, the worse it gets.

Ezra, the book, leaves us longing for Jesus. Our father, and our father God, the king, who brings clarity to the complex world that we live in. And guess what? In him, your problem solving isn't in question, there's no murkiness because there's no problems to solve. You solved them all. But now you have access to him and you've been going at it alone for so long. How much longer are you gonna do it? How much longer are you gonna pretend that everything is okay? The story of Ezra is that we don't have all the answers and it should leave us with a question mark and a hope and asking a question. Don't we just wish a father would come back and solve all this mess. And that's what he's gonna do. Let's pray.

Jesus, you're a king. Jesus, you are awesome savior. Oh God, we need a father here in our presence. That would love us. Who begs us to come home to be with him. Sometimes we feel so lost. We feel so distracted. We feel so longing. We feel like we're out there doing a bunch of stuff, playing life, having jobs, and managing relationships. And it just feels so hard sometimes. And so I got these headphones in my ears because if I pull 'em out, I'm gonna have to deal with it, Lord. If I pull these headphones out, my thoughts are there. My trauma's waiting. Lord. If I, if I come home early from work, I'm gonna have to deal with this marriage. And I don't know if I can. Lord, I don't know if I could be a good dad or a good mom. I don't think I can. Come home. That's what the Lord is saying to us. We have an opportunity to be in his presence in his holy

house, where we can dwell with him, like the Psalmist says, where underneath the tree of life as it's planted besides the river and it's nourishing to us. It's cool. The feeling of relaxation and peace can come over us. We don't have to run any longer. Lord, we love you. We praise you. In Jesus'-- name. Amen.