

Introduction

- Driving in England for the first time - learning to drive on the opposite side of the road, roads much narrower, playing chicken going down narrow roads where it's impossible to pass. On the first day - anxious - by the last day, I knew what I was doing. More time behind the wheel, more confident.
- Day in and day out, as you walk with the Lord, you learn that He is faithful. You see His provisions. You experience His grace and goodness. You see His work in your life and the lives of others. His faithfulness fuels confidence and bold faith.
- Think about your relationship with God this morning. Do you feel confident? Do you feel bold in your faith? Some of us on our faith journey feel unsettled. We feel like our faith is weak. We feel like we don't trust God like we should.
- If you feel like your faith is unsettled or that you lack confidence in your walk with the Lord, let me encourage you to not give up on the journey. Keep trusting the Lord. Keep pursuing Him. The more you walk with the Lord, the more you see Him at work, and the more confident you become.
- [Ezra 8](#) is a helpful chapter because it shows us faith in action. [Ezra 8](#) helps us to see bold faith in action. [Ezra 8](#) reminds us HOW we can have confidence on the journey of faith. From this passage, I want to show you three ways to walk in confident faith.

Remember your unique calling (vs. 1-20).

- [Ezra 7](#) starts the second section. The first six chapters of Ezra deal with God's people rebuilding the temple, while chapters 7-10 deal with God rebuilding His people.
- In [Ezra 7](#), God called Ezra, a priest and scribe, to lead a second wave of exiles back to Jerusalem 60 years after the first group of exiles returned.
- King Artaxerxes commissioned him to teach God's Law and help establish spiritual order among God's people. Ezra had prepared his heart to study, obey, and teach God's Word. The gracious hand of God was upon Ezra.
- In [Ezra 8](#), names of people who returned with Ezra. The second wave of people that return with Ezra are nowhere near as numerous as the number of people who returned with Zerubbabel - about 5,000 (1496 males) return compared to the first wave of over 40,000.
- vs. 2 - Gershom descendant of Phinehas - grandson of Aaron, Ithamar, a son of Aaron - Aaron was the first priest of Israel. Reminded of a spiritual heritage.
- Hattush from David - Zerubbael was a descendant of David, now another descendant. Messiah comes from the line of David.
- The first three names listed a reminder that what's most important in rebuilding Israel is establishing proper worship in anticipation of God's Messiah.
- After three days of traveling camp at the river that flows to Ahava. Ezra takes an assessment of the people traveling with him and discovers no Levites.
- Priests came from the tribe of Levi, but not all Levites were priests. Levites were subordinate to the priests and assisted in temple work.

- They guarded the temple, looked after the cleaning of all the furniture, prepared the bread of the Presences of the table of shewbread, led music, assisted in slaughtering and skinning sacrificial animals, examined lepers. They helped to explain the Law ([Nehemiah 8:7-8](#)).
- It was a menial existence. They were always in the presence of the holy things of God, but it was grunt work. Without the Levites, the priests would be greatly hindered in their work. The priests dependent on the Levites.
- Why didn't the Levites return with Ezra? Text doesn't tell us but maybe they were unwilling because they had more comfortable lives in Babylon and didn't want to return to the menial work of the Levites.
- Ezra sends a group of men to gather Levites to join him. Ultimately, Ezra able to get 38 Levites and 220 temple servants to return with him. vs. 18 - the gracious hand of God compels the Levites to return.
- A reminder that serving the Lord is not always glamorous. It's often faithfully plodding along doing the work that often goes unnoticed and under appreciated.
- The grunt work of faithful prayer that no one notices but is necessary. The grunt work of discipleship - coming alongside someone else and investing in their lives, the grunt work of serving the church - maybe in children's ministry or showing hospitality, or the grunt work of serving your family for the glory of God.
- You have a unique calling on your life to serve the Lord with gladness even when your service goes unnoticed.
- **Serve with no expectation.** No expectation that you will receive an earthly reward (that's what we want), but with every expectation of a heavenly reward.
- **Sacrifice without accolades.** Lay your life down knowing that you may not get any pats on the back for your sacrifices.

- **Persevere with one desire.** Whatever you do, do for the glory of God; not your own glory.
- Repent of where you have been unwilling to serve the Lord, or when you've served with an attitude of "what's in it for me?"

Rely on God with courage (vs. 21-23).

- 900 mile journey full of danger. What if they got lost? What if they got sick? Their biggest threat would be enemies along the way - bandits.
- They needed protection, but Ezra determined not to rely on the king's protection.
- Not wrong to rely on the king's protection. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem with the king's infantry ([Nehemiah 1:9](#)). Courageous faith does not mean rejecting practical help, but courageous faith does mean trusting God more than we trust practical help.
- There's nothing wrong with going to the doctor, carrying insurance, saving for retirement, etc. But, when those things fail, who will you ultimately trust?
- Bigger question: who do the people around you see you trust? Do they see you actively trusting the Lord? Or, trusting the resources of man?
- God often works through ordinary means like doctors or your wise financial planning, but at times God also works in miraculous, unexplainable ways. In [Ezra 8](#), Ezra led the people to ask God to work in a miraculous way so that the king might see the power of God on display in the lives of His people.
- After all, Ezra had told the king that the hand of God was on the Israelites. Ezra was "ashamed" to ask the king. How could he ask the king for protection when he had told him that God's hand was upon them?

- Instead of asking for military help, Ezra led the people to fast and pray. Imagine the scene on the banks of the Ahava River. Thousands of people on their faces before God, pleading for His hand of protection, asking God to do what only God could do. Ezra doesn't tell us for how long, but perhaps for days or weeks they fasted - abstaining from food as a way to tell God they hungered for His power even more than they hungered for the food they ate.
- vs. 23 - "God was receptive to our prayer..." He was faithful to answer.
- Conviction - not wrong to rely on practical resources, but how often do we turn to the practical help before we turn to the Lord in prayer? And, how desperate are we to actually see God at work?
- Do we really rely on God with courage? If I'm a person of courageous faith I will:
- **Pray for God to do what only only God can do.** Only God can save my lost family members, so I'm going to persist in praying for them. Only God can repair a broken marriage, bring my prodigal child home, or give me wisdom about next steps in my career, so I'm going to plead with Him.
- **Live as if God can do what only God can do.** Ezra didn't just organize a prayer meeting. They moved in faith. They made the 900 mile journey, and they walked in the supernatural protection of God. For you, living as if God can do what only God can do is not only praying for a missions team, but you joining a missions team. It's praying for a lost friend and sharing the Gospel with them. It's praying for wisdom at work, and then living with Gospel boldness at work. It's praying for a broken relationship and taking steps towards restoration. It's praying for God to provide financially and then obeying Him in generosity when it would be easier to hold on tightly to what you have.
- Many followers of Jesus have a theology that says, "God is able..." but don't actually live as if they believe their own theology.

- If someone were to watch your life for a month, would they conclude that you trust your resources or trust the Lord?
- Courageous faith is not merely believing that God can. Courageous faith is taking the next step of obedience because you believe that He is able to do more than you can think or imagine ([Ephesians 3:20-21](#)).
- Right now, how do you need to plead with God? And, what steps of faith do you need to take that demonstrate you trust Him more than you trust the practical resources that you have?
- Northwood East Bay (and our family of churches) - a story of courageous faith. We need to continue to pray and act in faith to see more healthy churches in our city.

Remain full of integrity.

- vs. 24-30 - You can understand why they needed protection. They had much wealth to carry with them that would be used for worship at the temple. They carried treasures that were literally worth hundreds of millions of dollars.
- They needed divine protection. There were no armored trucks, no digital tracking, just twelve leading priests and a few others who were responsible to make sure these treasures got to Jerusalem.
- There were pounds and pounds of offerings of silver and gold. Imagine the responsibility of carrying 15,000 pounds of gold and silver to Jerusalem. If you were a priest responsible for carrying some of that wealth, you might be tempted to fear. You also might be tempted to take. Would anyone notice if you took a couple pieces of silver and gold?
- Notice vs. 28-29 - As Ezra begins the journey he reminds them: “You are holy to the Lord... Guard them carefully...” This was a big deal. Those carrying the treasures needed to be full of courageous faith and integrity.

- Once they made it to Jerusalem, they gave an account for everything they traveled with. It was all there. Those responsible for carrying the temple treasures acted with utmost integrity.
- These final verses of [Ezra 8](#) are a good reminder that integrity is necessary in ministry.
- The question we don't ask is, "Can I get away with it?" A little sin, a little dishonesty, a little white lie, etc. Rather, the question we ask ourselves is, "Will I honor the Lord with what He's entrusted me?" That's integrity.
- Three questions to ask yourself to determine if you're living with integrity.
- **Are you following through with your commitments?** People of integrity keep their word. Are you keeping your word to your spouse? Your friends? Your church?
- **Are you handing what God gives you with faithfulness?** The questions is not, "How much do I have?" But, "How faithful am I with what God has given me?" Instead of wishing for more, use what God has given you for His glory.
- **Are you mindful of how your choices affect others?** Every choice you make impacts someone. The choices you make to NOT honor the Lord with what He has given you affects your family and your church. Your life is not in isolation from others. People of integrity understand that their lives are not their own. They recognize that faithfulness is relational, not merely personal.
- Integrity is living with the awareness that other people are counting on your faithfulness.
- If you're struggling with being faithful on the journey, remember Jesus. He understood His unique calling - to come to this earth as the God-man to live perfectly for us only to die a sinner's death. He relied on His heavenly Father with courage. He trusted His Father's plan even to

death on the cross only to rise again. Jesus was full of integrity. He knew the eyes of the world were on Him, and He never once faltered.

- Jesus did all of this for you. This morning, if you do not have a relationship with Jesus, repent of your sins and give your life to Him. Place your eyes on Him and walk the journey of faith in Jesus.