

Small Group Guide: Ezra Part 2

****Character Studies in the Old Testament Summer Series 2026****

****Text: Ezra 7:1-10****

Opening Prayer (2-3 minutes)

Ask someone to open in prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and reveal areas where hearts need to be realigned around God's Word.

Ice Breaker (5-10 minutes)

****Question:**** What's one habit or routine you've established in your life that has become so automatic it shapes how you respond to situations? (Could be positive or negative)

This helps transition into discussing how Ezra made God's Word his automatic response system.

Sermon Summary (5 minutes)

Have someone briefly summarize the main points:

- Ezra's heart was "fixed" or "established" on God's Word like a foundation stone
- His three-fold pattern: Study → Practice → Teach
- The danger of "temple-shaped lives" with "idol-shaped hearts"
- The call to move from symbolic worship to substantive holiness

Discussion Questions

Section 1: Understanding Ezra's Foundation (15-20 minutes)

1. **Read Ezra 7:10 together.** What does it mean that Ezra "firmly resolved" or "prepared his heart"? How is this different from just having good intentions?
2. The sermon described Ezra's heart preparation like "setting a foundation stone" or "fixing a pillar." What would it look like practically to make God's Word that immovable in your life?
3. Why do you think the order matters: seek THEN do THEN teach? What happens when we reverse this order?

Section 2: Confronting Our Idols (15-20 minutes)

4. The sermon mentioned several modern idols:
 - The idol of comfort ("I'll obey until it hurts my lifestyle")
 - The idol of image ("I'll worship as long as it makes me look good")
 - The idol of control ("I'll follow God as long as I retain veto power")

****Which of these resonates most with you? Why?***

5. What does it mean to have a "temple-shaped life" but an "idol-shaped heart"? Can you think of examples from your own life where you've gone through religious motions while your heart was elsewhere?
6. The sermon asked: "If someone read your schedule, bank statement, browser history, screen time, or listened to your conversations this week, would they conclude your heart is fixed on the law of the Lord—or on the gods of our age?"

****Without oversharing, what does your honest answer reveal? (Allow space for vulnerability)****

**Section 3: The Path to Genuine Holiness (15-20 minutes)**

7. **Read the three-fold pattern again:**

- ****Study the Word**** – digging deep, not skimming for quotes
- ****Practice the Word**** – costly obedience
- ****Teach the Word**** – sharing what you've bled for

****Where do you typically get stuck in this process?****

8. The sermon said, "Clarity of teaching the Word itself is prophetic" in our distracted culture. How can we cultivate a hunger for clear, direct Bible teaching rather than just entertainment or inspiration?

9. Ezra led the people to "concrete reforms" that rearranged their lives. What's one area of your life that the Holy Spirit might be asking you to concretely rearrange based on Scripture?

Key Takeaways

Have different group members read these aloud:

1. **God uses men and women whose hearts are re-aligned around His Word to lead His people out of cultural religion and back into living holiness.**

2. **Genuine holiness never starts with programs or preferences—it starts with the Word of God changing the heart of His people.**

3. **The pattern for spiritual transformation is: Word in the heart → Word in the life → Word from the mouth.**

4. **We cannot teach what we have not obeyed. Character must precede platform.**

5. **The greatest hindrance to worship is not style but the idolatry within our own hearts.**

Practical Application: The Life Change Challenge

This Week's Challenge (Review together):

1. **Set a time** – Choose one fixed time each day this week (same time every day) to slowly read and seek one chapter of Scripture (start with Psalm 1 or Ezra 7–8); write one sentence of personal obedience from what you read.

2. **Obey one concrete command** – From what you read each day, identify one specific, costly obedience (a conversation to have, a habit to stop, a generosity step to take) and actually do it within 24 hours.

3. **Share what you're learning** – Before next Sunday, tell one person what God showed you in the Word this week and how you obeyed it; ask them to pray that your heart would stay fixed.

Group Accountability:

- **Pair up** with one other person in the group to check in mid-week about your daily Scripture reading and obedience steps.
- **Share contact information** and commit to one text/call this week.
- Plan to share briefly next week: What was the hardest obedience step you took?

Personal Reflection (5 minutes of silence)

Ask the group to spend 5 minutes in silent reflection on these questions:

- What is one "Babylonian god" I'm still carrying in my pocket?
- What would it look like for my heart to be truly "fixed" on God's Word this week?
- What is one costly obedience I'm avoiding?

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Prayer Format:

1. **Confession** – Invite people to silently confess areas where their hearts have been divided or idol-shaped
2. **Commitment** – Pray together for God to help each person "prepare their heart" like Ezra
3. **Courage** – Ask for courage to obey concretely, even when it costs something
4. **Community** – Pray for this group to be a place of honest accountability and grace

Close by having someone pray the final prayer from the sermon: *"Lord, take us from 'attending the temple and making the sacrifice' to preparing our hearts like Ezra—to seek, to do, and then to teach Your Word."*

Before Next Week

- Complete the daily Life Change Challenge
- Contact your accountability partner mid-week
- Come prepared to share one thing God taught you through His Word this week

Leader Notes

- **Be vulnerable first** – Share your own struggles with idols and obedience
- **Protect confidentiality** – Remind the group that what's shared stays in the group
- **Don't rush** – It's okay if you don't get through every question
- **Watch for the Holy Spirit** – Be willing to pause and pray if someone is experiencing conviction
- **Follow up** – Reach out to anyone who seemed particularly challenged or encouraged