

Day 1
January 22



Pray | Help me to remember that you are always faithful in your promises

God keeps his promises. Jeremiah's prophecy has been fulfilled. After 70 years, the Israelites were finally brought back to the land of promise under the rule of King Cyrus, a Persian king. Cyrus realized that even though he was a powerful king, he was still ruled by someone greater. Cyrus was following God's plan when he allowed the Israelites to return to the Promised Land and rebuild their homes and temple. Instead of calling for a mandatory gift, King Cyrus insisted upon a voluntary offering to the lord. Although Cyrus was not one of God's people, his assumption that God's faithfulness would create in the people a charitable heart, is instructive for us all.



Read | Ezra 1:1-4, Jeremiah 29:10-11



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

After 70 year of captivity the people of Israel were allowed to return to their homeland. God's plans may allow for hardship, but his desire is for our good. Reflect on hardship you have suffered. How did you see God at work during that time?

God appointed Cyrus to see that the temple in Jerusalem would be rebuilt. Cyrus might not have been Israel's first choice of leaders, but he was God's choice. Whether it be a leader at work, school, or a civic leader, we all have leaders whom we don't always agree with, or just don't like. How do you see God working through these leaders today?

In verse 3, Cyrus extended an invitation for the Israelites to return home and build a place of worship, much the same as God invites us every day to walk with him. Are you accepting of God's invitation to walk with him today, or is he patiently waiting for you to return to him? What is holding you back?

Day 2
January 23



Pray | Help me to become a better steward of your resources

A natural response to God's faithfulness and sovereignty is the cheerful giving of one's possessions to the lord. The Israelites generously gave to the building of the temple so that they would have a place to worship. The joyful response to God returning the Israelites to their land is an illustration that acknowledges an important truth: the land and all that it produces belong to God; we are simply stewards. The relationship between stewardship and worship assumes that money is not the only thing that believers are to steward. God calls us to be stewards of such things as our time, relationships, children, talents, and occupational expertise. God has given us these commodities to encourage the physical and spiritual nourishing of humanity as a sign of the coming kingdom.



Read | Ezra 1:4-11



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

Reflect on your stewardship habits. Do you regularly acknowledge and demonstrate that everything is God's and is to be used for his purposes?

When have you experienced God moving your heart not simply to believe, but to do or give? Have you resisted God's work in your heart? If so, what were the consequences?

The Israelites were excited to rebuild the temple to have a place to worship. Reflect on a place, perhaps a building or outdoor location where you had a powerful spiritual experience with God. What does that place represent to you today?

Day 3

January 24



Pray | *Please show me how I can serve you today.*

Worshipping God should be the first priority of his people. The Israelites had returned to their homeland and were ready to worship God and precisely follow the rules written in the Law of Moses. God's people had gladness that overflowed into giving to the Lord. If we find it hard to incorporate giving into our worship, it is probably because we are treasuring God's gifts more than God himself. Likewise, we sometimes tend to cling to the process or rituals of worship and not to the God whom we worship. For many years, Israel connected worship to the temple. So much so, that they had come to rely more on the temple than on the Lord (Jer. 7). Since the temple had been destroyed, the Israelites rediscovered the ever-present nature of God and the appropriate value of the temple as a means of worship.



Read | *Ezra 3:1-7*



Reflect | *Promise to dedicate more of your time to worship..*

Do you have worship traditions that overtake your focus on the God you are worshipping? How can you focus more on God rather than on your actions during worship?

The Israelites built the altar, and in verses 3-7 we see how they made daily offerings for the Lord, as well as their generosity of money, food and supplies for those helping to build the altar. How are you building your altar to God? What do you sacrifice for him?

Do you make a practice of worshipping through giving? Spend some time in prayer asking God to show you how can you make worshipping through giving a regular practice.

Day 4
January 25



Pray | Ask God to help you be more intentional in your worship

Worship is at the center of life in the community of faith. The Israelites participated in a variety of worship forms that engage various parts of our being as humans. In church life, the tendency is for believers to quarantine themselves from others who participate in biblical worship in different ways. Different church bodies tend toward a certain type of worship expression and have a tendency to criticize or stereotype those who worship differently. There is a temptation among those who express their devotion to God through thoughtful liturgy to think that those who shout for joy are mindless in their praises to God. On the other hand, those who worship with a shout tend to wonder if those who worship solemnly have truly experienced the goodness of God. Neither worship style is right or wrong. We should learn from each other, so that we can all express our love to God more robustly.



Read | *Ezra 3:8-13*



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

What characteristics have you encountered regarding other worship styles? Have you found yourself critical of these other styles? What do you learn from people who worship differently than you do?

Completing the temple took a lot of hard work from a lot of people. In verse 10 we see that the people thanked God and did not focus on their own accomplishments. Do you give God recognition and thanks where necessary for your accomplishments?

Verse 12 shows unhappiness in some of the people with the condition of the temple. God cares more about our intent in worship than in the beauty of the building where we worship. Where do you worship God outside of the church building?

Day 5
January 26



Pray | Help me reflect God's love to others today

God kept his promise to bring his people out of exile and back to the promised land. As God's people gathered in Jerusalem, they made their worship of God their first priority and proclaimed God's faithfulness through their actions. Neither experiencing the presence of God nor the opportunity to worship him are tethered to a physical location. Christians are said to be the very temple of God by the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in them. God calls his followers to make worship the first priority, no matter where he sends us or what the cost, so that others will see his goodness and love.



Read | 1 Cor. 3:16-17



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

As Christians, we celebrate and give thanks to God for giving us Jesus, who saved us from our sins. Spend some time in prayer, committing yourself to living a life for Jesus, inviting his spirit into your heart, and thanking God for sending us Jesus Christ.

All Christians, together, are the temple of God. What can you do this week to strengthen your relationships with other Christians, and focus on good together, instead of on your individual interests?

God's spirit lives within those that know him. How will you reflect God's love and goodness onto others today?

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