

# KINGDOM WORK

Week Four | May 19, 2019 | True Leaders in Kingdom Work Live Authentically

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's texts, Ezra 9–10; 1 Peter 1:15; and Romans 8:13. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God's standard for His people is holiness.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

We repent of our wickedness and lead others to do the same.

### MEDITATE

*"O Lord, the God of Israel, you are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before you in our guilt, for none can stand before you because of this" (Ezra 9:15).*

## GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

At some point in your life, you've probably ordered a pizza. You've felt that rumble in your stomach, checked your fridge and found it lacking, and subsequently ordered pizza to be delivered to your door in thirty minutes or less. Your belly is full, and your palate is satisfied by the taste of tomato sauce mixed with melted cheese and chewy crust. In less than an hour, you've eaten Italian food. But does eating delivered pizza mean you have eaten authentic Italian food? What if you traveled to Sicily and asked the locals where to find the best pizza? They might direct you to the kitchen of a local chef who has spent hours preparing homemade pizza with fresh ingredients. While both pizzas would satisfy your hunger, only the latter would be considered authentic. Authenticity is rare but unmistakable. And God calls His people to live authentically. True leaders in kingdom work demonstrate their commitment to God and His Word through their authenticity.

John received a vision of heaven while exiled on the island of Patmos. He observed winged creatures that all day and night never stopped saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8). Our God is holy and His standard for us is holiness. He commands us to "be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44). Peter references this command in his letter to the church, "As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15).

True leaders in kingdom work will be known by their passion for holiness. As we lead in our homes, marketplaces, churches, and communities, we must lead through our authentic witness of His grace in our lives to make us holy. God calls His children to holiness. And what He demands, He also provides. He establishes our hearts blameless in holiness (1 Thessalonians 3:13).

The idea of thriving in holiness may sound daunting, but it's freely offered to all who trust Christ for it. Jesus died to make us holy. His death provided the way for us to have peace with a holy God. His Spirit within us produces such holiness. We don't just talk about it, we live holy lives. We live authentically. We align our lives in accordance with the Scriptures. We repent of our sins and lead others to do the same. We are passionate about purity. God defines the standards we live by, not us. When we submit to His standards, we bear witness to the One who is worth rejecting the world's trinkets for. Because He is our true treasure.

Today we will wrap up our study of Ezra. We will see his passion for holiness. Ezra was confronted with the sin of the people he was sent to lead. He feared God and therefore knew the people's sin was serious and grievous to God. He repented and led them to repentance at great cost to themselves. Ezra teaches us that we cannot have a casual relationship with sin. We must reject it, repent, and throw ourselves at the mercy of God while living in obedience to His good commands. We must live authentically. Union with Christ is incompatible with a life of unrepentant sin. Are you serious about sin? Do you have a passion for holiness? Does your public life reflect your private life? Are you living according to God's standards? May the Lord grant us grace to be passionate for His glory to be declared through our obedience as we lead others in His kingdom work.

👤: *How do you lead others to repentance? Think of ways your faith family can encourage authenticity by confession of sin and accountability in it.*

👤: *What would people say you're passionate about? What might it look like to be passionate about holiness?*

## 📌 UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

In today's lesson we will learn from Ezra's example how leaders exhibit passion for holiness in their own lives and the lives of those they lead.

1. TRUE LEADERS ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT PURITY

2. TRUE LEADERS LEAD BY EXAMPLE

3. TRUE LEADERS LEAD OTHERS INTO REPENTANCE

## GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

## TRUE LEADERS ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT PURITY

### 📌 EZRA 9:3 AND ROMANS 8:13

👤: *What was Ezra's response to learning of the people's sin?*

👤: *How do we put to death the deeds of the body?*

We are more likely to be known for our passion for sports or food or fashion than our passion for purity. Purity feels out of style. Its relevance seems insignificant in our modern, sophisticated times. But purity is always to be celebrated and championed among the children of God. We are called to purity, and we reflect our Father to the world through our passion for it.

Ezra was a leader who was passionate about purity. He was about five months into his new role as spiritual leader of the returned exiles in Jerusalem when officials approached him with this news. “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 beard and sat appalled” (Ezra 9:1–3).

Ezra’s reaction to the people’s rebellion is extreme. Its intensity shows his passion for purity. Ezra was charged with the spiritual leadership of God’s people. Their apostasy greatly grieved him. He did not approach their sin casually. He knew the seriousness of it. John Owen, the seventeenth century Puritan pastor said, “He that hath slight thoughts of sin never had great thoughts of God.” Ezra had a high view of God and His standards, which caused him to view sin in its ugly reality. Ezra “sat appalled.” He performed ritual acts of mourning, tearing his clothes and pulling out his hair. God called His people to holiness, but they rejected His standards and mixed themselves with idolaters. It’s important to understand that their sin is not in mixing races, but in mixing religions. They joined themselves to people who worshipped false gods and welcomed idolatry into their homes. They did not fear the Lord. Essentially, they abandoned their faith.

So, Ezra, their leader, mourned their sin. He was appalled. Ashamed. Disgusted. Are we so offended by sin? As the spiritual leaders of our children, are we appalled by their sin? Does the wickedness of those in our churches grieve us? Does our own sin disgust us? Ezra was devoted to God’s Word. He knew God’s standard for His people is holiness. The only response to such wickedness was mourning and repentance.

John Owen famously wrote in *The Mortification of Sin*, “Do you mortify? Do you make it your daily work? Be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you.” Paul wrote about this in Romans 8:13, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Sin is not a thing to be tolerated, it is a thing to be destroyed. Mortified. Killed.

As believers, we no longer live in sin. We put sin to death by the power of the Holy Spirit within us. This is our privilege as adopted sons and daughters of the King. We don’t make peace with sin, we obliterate it.

True leaders in kingdom work must be passionate about purity. We don't have to be perfect, but we must be authentic in our pursuit of holiness. We must be slayers of sin. When others look to us as we lead in our various contexts, let them see our passion for our King and His good standards for our lives.

🕒: *What is your response to sin in your own life and in the lives of those around you? How can Psalm 119:9 encourage and help you in your passion for purity?*

🕒: *Moral failure among God's people abounds. How might a passion for purity protect us against the temptation to sin? What Scriptures can we memorize to help us in this pursuit?*

## TRUE LEADERS LEAD BY EXAMPLE

📖 EZRA 9:4, 10:1

🕒: *What did the people do while Ezra sat appalled?*

🕒: *How did the people respond to Ezra's repentance?*

Ezra's heart is broken. He came to teach God's Word to the returned exiles and after only a few months, he learns of their great sin. Can you imagine his anguish as he tears his clothes and rips the hair from his head? He's heartbroken over the people's sin and performs the ritual acts of mourning reflective of true repentance. Ezra, the great teacher, doesn't gather the people and preach a sermon. He doesn't tell them what they need to do. He leads by example. He mourns and repents publicly. But he wasn't alone. "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" (Ezra 9:4). The people witnessed Ezra's reaction to their sin and gathered

around. They were learning from their teacher's actions that day, not just his words. They were described as those who "trembled" at the words of God. Their trembling demonstrated their eagerness to repent and obey God.

Ezra continued to teach and lead as he fell to his knees and prayed to God, acknowledging their sin. Though he did not join the people in this particular sin, he identified with them in their sin, calling it "our iniquities" that rose higher than their heads and "our guilt" that mounted up to the heavens (Ezra 9:6). He said "we have forsaken your commandments" not to marry the idolatrous people (Ezra 9:10–12). Ezra leads by example through his prayer. The people gathered and mourned for their sins. "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" (Ezra 10:1).

True leaders in kingdom work don't just tell people how to live godly lives, they show it through their own authenticity. As we teach others what obedience looks like, we must also be obedient to God's commands. In our labors to advance His kingdom on the earth, we must live authentically. We repent for our sins and do it publicly, when appropriate, to demonstrate a life of repentance. People need to see our example. Will we give it? A true leader's public life will serve to authenticate their private life. As we proclaim the gospel in our workplaces, our behavior lends validity to our words. In our home leadership, there is no discrepancy between what we do and what we say. Our online lives should match our private ones. We lead through our authenticity.

When we don't live by God's standards, we discredit the gospel's power in our lives, confusing those we're trying to witness to. Authenticity is critical for our witness in our homes and communities. Our authenticity makes us true leaders in God's kingdom. It provides the necessary credibility as we lead by example. We must teach others how to live in holiness by showing them how it's done. This is how we lead in kingdom work.

**Q:** *If others are following your example, what would they be led to?*

**Q:** *What is likely to happen when our actions don't match our words? How can we cause great damage to others by not living authentically?*

# TRUE LEADERS LEAD OTHERS INTO REPENTANCE

## ❑ EZRA 10:2-4

🗣️: *What did Shecaniah say they had done against God?*

🗣️: *Shecaniah presented this plan to Ezra according to whose counsel?*

Ezra's public demonstration of grief resulted in the people gathering with him and openly repenting, as shown by their bitter weeping (Ezra 10:1). They followed Ezra's example as he led his people to repentance. This is what true leaders in kingdom work do. Kingdom citizens are unique in that we do not grieve without hope. It is our privilege to hope as children of the King. And these sinful exiles knew that. They sinned against God by mixing with wicked people they had been explicitly warned away from. These people were among those whom God commanded Moses to "devote to complete destruction" when they entered the promised land. They were not to marry them, make covenants with them, or show any mercy towards them (Deuteronomy 7:2-3). But the people disobeyed. In their repentance, they looked to the hope that their merciful God inspired in them.

"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.'" (Ezra 10:2-4).

Sin is ugly and carries with it harsh consequences. Though the returned exiles knew they were forgiven for their sins, they also desired to live authentic lives of obedience to God's law. God called them to holiness, and they determined to do whatever was necessary to live lives that were holy, or set apart, for His good purposes. Based on Ezra's counsel, they agreed to separate themselves from that which offended God. Their trembling at His commandments meant they were eager to please Him. Pleasing God means obeying Him. So, they determined to put away their wives and children of the idolatrous nations.

We should not read this text with an understanding that divorcing an unbelieving spouse pleases God. Scripture

denies this (1 Corinthians 7:12–14). This text is descriptive, not prescriptive. It is meant to describe what happened in Ezra’s day, not prescribe a course of action for us. We should also realize that the word used for “marriage” in this text is not the usual word used in Scripture. It translates “given a home.” Likewise, the people do not propose to divorce their wives, but to “put them away” (Ezra 10:3). For this reason, many scholars believe that these unions, though sinful, were not legitimate marriages. They brought these people into their homes and mixed their lives with them. They sought to remedy this situation by sending them out of their lives or excommunicating them. The people had joined with what God said was unholy, and now they created a plan to separate themselves. They desired to bring their lives into submission with God’s law.

The Bible never says what happened to the women and children who were put away. It doesn’t discuss the heartbreak of the exiles who willingly abandoned their loved ones. This makes us uncomfortable, and it should. Sin is egregious, and its consequences are tragic. This text should create in us a holy fear of God. We shouldn’t be wondering how God could require this of His people. We don’t pass the blame on to Him. He didn’t do this. The sinful people did. They knew they were wrong and, at great cost to themselves, purified themselves through repentance and trust in the mercy of God. They had hope despite their great sin. And so do we.

Holiness is God’s standard for His children. When we fail to live holy lives, we must, like the Israelites in Ezra’s day, repent. “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). We hope. We thank the Lord for leading us into repentance, lead others to repent of their wickedness, and recognize the intervening grace of our great God in our lives. He doesn’t leave us in our sin. He comes for us. Sometimes He comes to reveal our sin to our blind eyes. We need not feel shame. Know God’s great mercy in confronting your sin and His great grace in giving you a heart to turn from it. God calls us to live authentically. He enables us to do so through Jesus. It is our privilege to live in holiness before our great Father as we do His kingdom work on earth.

🔗: *What blessings do we find in the Bible for those who repent of their sin?*

🔗: *Consider ways you can lead those in your spheres of influence to repent. Pray for those living in sin to repent.*



## NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

🗨️: *God calls us to holiness. We know He wouldn't call us to something that is impossible. What gives us the confidence to live holy lives?*

🗨️: *Discuss examples of people both from Scripture and your own church body who model repentance.*

## PRAY

+ *Use this prayer point to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

*Father, You are holy and You call us, Your sons and daughters, to be holy as well. Thank you for the privilege of this great call. Equip us to be holy. Fill us with Your Spirit, Lord. Make us a holy people for the sake of Your great name and glory in all the earth. Give us a passion for purity. Make us leaders who lead by example and lead others into repentance. Use our lives for Your great glory as we live authentically.*

## COMMENTARY

**EZRA 9:3** — Ezra expresses his deep dismay by performing ritual acts of mourning. His severe reaction results from the fact that the “holy race” has compromised its newly won salvation by returning to the sins that had brought judgment in the first place.

**EZRA 9:9** — “We are slaves . . . in our slavery.” The idea that the exiles remain slaves is unexpected after their restoration to the land but acknowledges that they are still under the authority of Persia (see Nehemiah 9:36–37). Therefore, the favorable view of Persia thus far does not prevent the exiles’ aspiration to complete freedom. Even so, though they are under this foreign authority, God has shown steadfast love, the special quality of faithful love that characterizes His attachment to Israel in the covenant, and that He expects in return (Hosea 6:6).

*\*All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes.*