

**Rebuild: Ezra-Nehemiah**  
**Part 4: Ezra's Reformation | Ezra 7-8**  
Rev. Andrew Jun

[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

## **Introduction**

Today's sermon is from Ezra 7-8 and is titled, "Ezra's Reformation."

*Show martin-luther.jpg.* Martin Luther is one of the most important figures in the history of the church because he was a major catalyst for the Protestant Reformation. In 1517, Luther famously presented his "Ninety-Five Theses" at the University of Wittenberg, a list of propositions that challenged the popular (and wrong) beliefs of the Western church at the time.

This wasn't intended to start anything big, but it went "viral" in a 16<sup>th</sup> century sort of way and is known to be the beginning of this movement that brought the church back to the core *biblical* beliefs that God's Word alone is our authority and that we are saved by God's grace alone, through faith, in Christ alone, for God's glory alone.

But what I would want to make clear today is this: before Martin Luther kicked off the Reformation, he himself was reformed by God's Word. When he studied it himself- namely when he studied the book of Romans- the Word of God transformed his beliefs, convictions, and way of life.

God has a great way of threading his redemptive history together so poetically. This is what happened to Ezra as well. As we'll see in Ezra 7-10, Ezra was used by God to reform the people of Israel. But before he did this, Ezra was reformed by God's Word. So Ezra's reformation of the people of God happened only after Ezra's reformation by the Word of God happened. This is what we'll see in the Scriptures today.

## **Proposition**

Ezra's example is for us today as well! The "one thing" from Ezra 7-8 for our generation today is this:

***Be reformed by God's Word into action for God's cause.***

May Ezra's reformation lead to the Word and Holy Spirit working in such a way that we experience a reformation of our hearts and minds as well, orienting us into God's cause. There is no time like now that we need this! In the midst of this pandemic, upheaval and unrest in our society, and our generation searching for its identity and purpose- this is what we need! This is what we need today and may God speak to us powerfully from this Scripture!

## **Organizational Statement**

When we dig back into the Scriptures and allow our hearts and minds to be reformed by God's Word, we see from Ezra 7-8 how it leads to two specific responses: first, **passion for God's Word ministry** and second, **faith steps within God's providence**. These will be the two main parts of my sermon.

## **Scripture Reading**

We won't read these two chapters in their entirety because it's so long, but I do intend for my sermon to still be an exposition of this Scripture. What I'll do is give a summary of Ezra 7-8 and then within each of my two main parts, I'll share two principles for us as *this generation* of reformed Christians.

Here's an overall summary and the key parts of Ezra 7-8. Ezra is introduced into the narrative, now 57 years later after the events of chapters 1-6. So this is two or three generations after that first group of exiles from Babylon settled back into Jerusalem and Judah and rebuilt the temple (which they finished). Ezra was a priest, a scribe, and some sort of government official who was born and raised in Babylonia. As he was a student of the Scriptures, he was burdened that his fellow Jews in Jerusalem were falling back into the mistakes of their ancestors.

Therefore, he requested permission from Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, to move to Jerusalem with a group of other Jews that were still in Babylonia. God's hand was upon Ezra, and he was granted the king's endorsement for this. So Ezra, along with other families, priests, Levites, and temple servants, traveled the dangerous four-month journey to Jerusalem. This is generally what happened in Ezra 7-8.

**Transition:** Now let's dive in the details. First, being reformed by God's Word into action for God's cause leads to...

## Sermon Outline

### I. **Passion for God's Word Ministry**

A. **Let's first take a deeper look at this person, Ezra, and how the Word of God shaped him uniquely for this crucial time in the history of Israel.**

1. [Here's the first principle that I want us to take away from this part...] Principle #1: This generation of reformed Christians cultivates passionate learning and teaching of God's Word!
  - a) First, Ezra was a Jew who was born and raised in Babylonia- a foreign, pagan land. In fact, most likely even his parents were too. So he was a Babylonian-born Jew (like I'm an American-born Korean or like some of you are Indonesian-born Chinese) who was at least two generations removed from the homeland of his people, Judah. We don't know why, but Ezra's parents chose not to go with that first group of exiles that returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple (remember this was 57 years later). But there are some clues that highlight that Ezra *grasped* his identity pretty clearly, as well as *how* he came to those conclusions.
  - b) First, he was a priest- and according to verses 1-5, he knew his lineage was linked all the way to Aaron himself. Aaron was the brother of Moses and only descendants of Aaron could be priests, those who served in the temple or tabernacle by offering the sacrifices there and blessing the people in prayer. So, it seems like for Ezra, his family, and a "remnant" in Babylonia, this was still an important part of their own lives- they remained in covenant relationship with YHWH even while being away from their homeland.
  - c) Second, Ezra was also a scribe, according to verse 6. This meant that he was trained as an expert in the Law, which was the Scriptures given to Moses from YHWH. So as a scribe, Ezra's job was to explain, interpret, and adapt the Law into the civic and religious rules of Jewish society. He was "skilled" in doing this, which is really cool: Ezra was a person really, really good at his job and God used his expertise in the Law and his skill as a careful, sharp, and wise lawyer (as we might call him today) to influence his generation of Jews and even the society at large. I think that this was a big reason *how* he knew YHWH personally and thus *how* he also knew his identity as part of Israel, the people of God.
  - d) This is also *how* he developed his convictions and burdens for his people. As he looked at YHWH and his Law, he realized the significance of what God had done in sending them into exile (because of their sin) and in delivering them back to Jerusalem and

rebuilding the temple. He had certainly heard reports or rumors of how the returned Jews were like now; he had heard that although they rebuilt the temple a few generations ago, they were still ignorant and lost in terms of what their covenant *relationship* with YHWH meant. Verse 10 summarizes this well:

- o Ezra 7:10 (ESV): *10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.*
  - e) As a priest and scribe, he had a passion for studying the Law of the Lord. As he studied, his faith moved him to obeying what it said- he tried his best to order his activities, behaviors, thinking, and desires around what YHWH revealed about himself and how he wanted his people to live. He desired for *his people* to also be passionately devoted to the Law of the Lord as well. As he grew in love for God's Word and it led to a greater devotion to YHWH himself, he also developed a vision for his Word ministry- *to teach his statutes and rules in Israel*. That last phrase *in Israel* is important: his growing conviction was to go to Jerusalem- a place he'd never been- to teach God's Word to this new generation of God's people.
2. [Here's the first principle from this part again...] Principle #1: This generation of reformed Christians cultivates passionate learning and teaching of God's Word!
- a) Context: This sounds great- but if you're like me, to be honest you're not *that* passionate about God's Word (even as a believer). It doesn't move you the way that we see it moving Ezra. What's up with that? Church, what I would challenge us all to do (including myself) is to *examine our hearts!* Jesus taught in Matthew 13:1-9 that the condition of our hearts determines how we respond to God's Word. He compared hearts to different kinds of ground. First, there's just the path- too hard to even allow the Word to sprout. Second, there's the rocky ground, where the Word gets people get excited at first but dries up quickly because no roots grow. Third, there's the thorny ground- the Word gets choked out by distractions and worries of life.
  - b) Context: So we start to cultivate passionate learning of God's Word by examining our hearts: Is my heart hard like a path because of my pride in thinking I already know this stuff? Is my heart rocky because I lack the persistence to keep studying the Word and the grit to follow through in doing what I know God wants me to do? Is my heart full of thorns- distractions and worries- that choke out whatever growth might happen? Ezra would know that the Law points us to God's holiness and our sinfulness! And thus, as we see the conditions of our hearts, we *must* lean completely on God's grace.
  - c) Context: In light of this, it is 100% a work of God's grace in his people in saving us, despite our heart conditions. There's a lot of ways to describe what happens when this happens but I'd like to think about when the resurrected Jesus talked to his disciples in Luke 24:13-34. He explained how all the Law and Prophets pointed to himself, as Jesus was the center and fulfillment of God's plan of salvation! The disciples said that it was like their hearts were burning inside of their chests as Jesus talked to them! When we trust Jesus in this way, that he died for *my sins* so that I could have *new life* in him, he changes our us- he changes the conditions of our hearts!
  - d) Context: Also, as we see in Ezra's case, God's Word sparked a passion for God's cause. This is the case for us too- we see a *Word ministry* (a way to serve others) in others who need it. We see the world differently: "It's not ok for me anymore to see people this way, not knowing God and his ways." For *some of us*, it will mean preaching sermons; but for *all of us* it means in the relationships we have with people. It includes our family members (especially our spouses and kids); it includes our co-workers, friends, and neighbors; it includes our fellow Christian brothers and sisters in LIFE groups. You have a Word ministry! We'll talk more about this in a second.
  - e) [Let me mention a "life application" here for you...] **Life Application #1: Confess your heart condition and ask the Lord to cultivate passion for God's Word.**

- o Do some honest evaluation of your heart condition- at this very moment- and see how you receive God's Word? Is your heart like the path? Like the rocky ground? Like the thorny ground? This isn't a surprise to God- we confess it humbly! And let's make it a bold ask to make *our hearts burn* as Jesus speaks to us! This is the kind of request that God loves to answer. Let's also be persistent in this, because it takes time to cultivate the "soil" of our hearts to be fruitful! [Ok, let's move on now...]

**B. In Ezra 7-8, God's Word sparked a passion for God's cause in Ezra- specifically for God's people. He saw a need for God's people to be instructed how to orient their lives towards God and his ways.**

1. [Here's the second principle that I want us to take away from this part...] Principle #2: This generation of reformed Christians is deeply connected and invested into the local church body.
  - a) Ezra did not go to Jerusalem by himself; he brought more of the remaining exiles back because this was an important part of God's promise to them. Here's what it says in...
    - o Ezra 7:7-9 (ESV): *7 And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants. 8 And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9 For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him.*

The people of Israel, some priests and Levites, singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants all went back to Jerusalem. When you look at chapter 8, you see a genealogy of the families that returned with Ezra. Verses 1-15 list fifteen families that were a part of the official registration of people who migrated from Babylonia to Judah with Ezra.
  - b) In 8:15, Ezra and these fifteen families gathered together at a place along the Ahava river. They camped there for three days, staging to start on their journey to Jerusalem. But in verses 16-20 of chapter 8, as Ezra was reviewing all the rosters of Jews going with him, he realized there were no Levite families among them. This doesn't seem like a big deal to us, but it was a big deal to Ezra! You see, Levites were people from the tribe of Levi (one of the original twelve tribes) who were given the responsibility of running the overall operations in the temple (by the way, the priests, who did the sacrifices, were a subset of the Levites). Ezra knew how important Levites were in reestablishing *proper, reverent* worship at the new temple- *this* was why it was a big deal to him.
  - c) So Ezra put the whole launch on pause to assemble a task force of "leading men" to search for some Levites. They went to the family of Iddo- this was also the family that Zechariah, the prophet from 60 years ago, was from. We don't know that much about them here, but they seemed to also be still running an enclave of faithful worshippers of YHWH within Babylonia at a place called Casiphia. They asked Iddo if they could send them ministers for the temple in Jerusalem; they got two men and their families, 38 more men in total. This wasn't a lot at all, but they were crucial to have, according to Ezra's opinion.
  - d) So a total of 1,496 men, along with 38 Levites and 220 temple servants, composed of Ezra's group of returning exiles to Jerusalem. The first batch of exiles, 57 years earlier, totaled 42,360- so this was a significantly smaller number of people. But the point of all of this being included in Ezra 7-8 is to show that these families and individuals mattered to the Lord, and thus they mattered to Ezra.
2. [Here's the second principle from this part again...] Principle #2: This generation of reformed Christians is deeply connected and invested into the local church body.

- a) **Context:** First, what is our status in terms of the covenant community of God? The New Testament teaches that what makes us spiritual offspring of Abraham (or part of the “spiritual” Israel) is faith in Jesus Christ.
- o Galatians 3:28-29 (NLT): *28 There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God’s promise to Abraham belongs to you.*

Just to make this clear: when we believe in Jesus Christ- that he is the King that God promised to send to save us from our sins and the punishment of death- we are now part of the people of God!

- b) **Context:** And Ezra’s understanding of the Scriptures was that *all* of God’s people were important to how the covenant community was supposed to function. In our day and age, we often do not see that this is still true: *all* of God’s people are important to how we as a local church are supposed to function. Now hold on because I might step on your toes a bit here, but please listen to what God is saying to you! It’s easy- even before the days of the pandemic- to not have a deep connection and investment with God’s people. For some of us, we don’t make the effort to connect at all- we just attend service and then we’re, “Peace out.” For some of us, we connect only with a *select* few of people- those who we think we click with and the rest remain scary, intimidating, or unappealing to get to know. For some of us, we’re usually passively waiting for others to serve us or approach us, and when people don’t we get judgmental or bitter.
- c) **Context:** But let me tell you today, church, that *every* person in the church is a *valuable* part of the church body! This is what Paul taught in...
- o 1 Corinthians 12:12, 18-21 (NLT): *12 The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. ...18 But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it. 19 How strange a body would be if it had only one part! 20 Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. 21 The eye can never say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” The head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you.”*

The “one thing” from Ezra 7-8 is **be reformed by God’s Word into action for God’s cause.** One big part of “God’s cause” is that he died to save you and me. Jesus did this and made us one *body*. And church people are messy, inconvenient, corrupt, chatty, and whatever other opinion you have. But you and I are *valuable* enough to Jesus to redeem us with his blood; when he does, he gives us new hearts to love and obey God’s Word, including our ministry of God’s Word and our ministry to God’s people!

- d) **Context:** So one of the greatest causes that you can dedicate yourself to is the building up of *your* church by being deeply connected to the people in the church and by investing yourself in helping each brother and sister in Christ of yours to follow *hard* after Jesus as you want to follow *hard* after Jesus! Definitely, you can invest by getting into the Word together- and teaching and admonishing each other! This is your Word ministry! You can invest by praying, serving, giving, and just loving people.
- e) [Let me mention another “life application” here for you...] **Life Application #2: Connect with others in the church by initiating new or stronger relationships.**
- o You can deeply connect starting first in your LIFE group but also by engaging in relationships with older and younger ones in the church, familiar and different ones, friendly and intimidating ones, nice and strange ones, ones that are in the front and the ones that are in the fringes. May we treasure this all the more having been separated during this pandemic and as we prepare to meet in person more in the coming months!

**Transition:** So, being reformed by God's Word into action for God's cause leads to passion for God's Word ministry. Second, we'll see that it also leads to...

## II. Faith Steps within God's Providence

A. *In this entire narrative, we see God's providence- that is, the way that he is the "primary cause" of everything in the world- and the steps of faith that Ezra took in light of it. It's pretty amazing!*

1. [Here's the third principle that I want us to take away from this part...] Principle #3: This generation of reformed Christians expresses faith in God's providence by taking steps of obedience.

a) Let's read this one part of this Scripture, from...

- o Ezra 7:6 (ESV): *...6 this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.*

This offers a great review of what's gone on here. Ezra was someone *personally reformed* by God's Word in his life in Babylonia- this was a work of God's grace! And this was not just for himself- no- this gave him his ministry as a *skilled scribe* to make sure that his small community of Jews who remained in Babylonia lived by the Law of Moses.

b) But this *personal reformation* also led Ezra to see the need for a greater cause- that the people of Israel who had returned to Jerusalem 57 years earlier were at risk of breaking covenant with the Lord again. As I mentioned earlier, they remained largely ignorant of God's Law in Jerusalem, those leaders from before (Zerubbabel and Jeshua, Haggai and Zechariah) were gone; generations had passed now and the memories of all that God had done were fading away. Ezra had probably heard these reports and grew burdened for his people. In verse 6 it says, *the king granted him all that he asked*, so it seems as though Ezra had some service to King Artaxerxes, had direct access to him, and actually requested to the king to be released to go to Jerusalem.

c) So Ezra 7:11-26 records Artaxerxes' decree in response to Ezra's request. In the providence of God, Artaxerxes sent Ezra to Jerusalem as a direct representative of the king of Persia to make sure that the Jews were falling in line with God's Word! According to verses 25-26, the king *ordered* Ezra to appoint magistrates (civic officials who carried out the law) and judges (civic officials who decided on legal cases) all through the region, who were specifically trained in the Law of Moses and how to apply it to their society. Additionally, Artaxerxes sent Ezra with a huge offering from the royal treasury to cover the expenses for all the sacrifices that were to be given at the temple and all the overhead costs required for the priests and Levites to run the temple operations. If they needed more, Artaxerxes decreed that more funds could be taken out of the royal treasury. He even gave them tax exemption status to ensure the temple ran well!

d) This was how Ezra responded to King Artaxerxes' letter in...

- o Ezra 7:27-28 (ESV): *27 Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, 28 and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the Lord my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.*

Ezra praised God for his *steadfast love* (that's the word "hesed"! ) in his life, and specifically in providing the favor of the king in this request. It went above and beyond what Ezra asked for! YHWH had put this on his heart, he took a courageous step of faith in accordance with his convictions from God's Word and what he saw among his people, and then he experienced the hand of the Lord his God on him!

2. [Here's the third principle from this part again ...] Principle #3: This generation of reformed Christians expresses faith in God's providence by taking steps of obedience.
- a) Context: As Ezra had set his heart to study the Scriptures and was committed to doing what it said himself and to teach it to his people, it led to these steps of faith that he had to take. These steps of obedience don't always have to be something "big" that totally changes our life direction (although it might be), but are usually more in the little steps of obedience that are exercises of faith in Christ. Let me give an example. James the apostle wrote this...
- o James 5:16 (ESV): *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*
- b) This is pretty simple, right? We're to confess sins to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as a way to keep each other accountable and facilitate for each other the forgiveness that is available in Christ. It's also so we can pray for each other, so that God can bring healing in our lives (as we confess our sins). This is powerful! But sadly, we don't experience the power of this often in our lives because we think that this kind of stuff is optional and we don't seriously consider obeying; or maybe we are convicted to do this but we're afraid doing it out of fear of hurting our reputations or of what others think of us. No matter what, we keep sins a secret and don't experience the value and joy of confessing our sins to one another. It is an expression of our faith to obey in these small ways that are already revealed to us in the Scriptures.
- c) Context: *Show neil-armstrong.jpg*. Neil Armstrong, as the first man to walk on the moon, said this when he did it: "That's one small step for man. One giant leap for mankind." He not only *crushed it* at that opportunity to speak to the whole world, but this is also something that's adaptable in terms of being a generation of reformed Christians who express our faith by taking little steps of obedience. When you take one small step of obedience, it's not small! It's a giant leap for your development as a disciple of Jesus! You are reinforcing in you that God is in control of everything in this universe, so you're going to go about life *his way*. Those little steps accumulate and take you one step at a time to those opportunities when God *will* (not can) use you in other's lives and in your world. This is the providence of God!
- d) [Let me mention a related "life application" here for you...] **Life Application #3:** Consecrate yourself to obedience to Christ in the small steps he has already revealed.
- o I mentioned this word "consecrate" last week; it's the idea of being "set apart" for God. I'd say that it's being resolved to obey God in whatever steps he wants us to take- big or small. And let's start with what he's already told us- there are tons of "one another" commands in the New Testament that we obey. We preach the gospel into our hearts to address our reservations, fears, reluctance, and excuses to *not* do them. Just keep telling yourself: "One small step of obedience is a giant leap for my development as a disciple of Jesus." [Ok, let's move on again now...]

**B. Lastly, I want to highlight one final thing that Ezra did as he led this remnant back to Jerusalem, as an expression of faith in the providence of God: he led his people to fast and pray!**

1. [Here's the fourth principle that I want us to take away from this part...] Principle #4: This generation of reformed Christians expresses faith in God's providence by fasting and praying together.
- a) Doesn't that seem a bit contradictory? God is totally in control of everything in the universe; *therefore* we fast and pray. This is fascinating to think about. So let's look at the scene at the Ahava river again. Ezra had reviewed all the families that had joined onto this journey; he had recruited two more Levite families; and now they were ready to go. This is what happened next...

- o Ezra 8:21-23 (ESV): 21 *Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. 22 For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, "The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him." 23 So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.*
  - b) So Ezra, although he had asked King Artaxerxes for permission to go to Jerusalem and lead a bunch of families to resettle there, he was *ashamed* to ask for additional military protection for the dangerous 1,500km journey. He had told the king that YHWH's hand would protect them, so he was shy to ask because it seemed to him (perhaps) as contradictory to his faith. Also, Ezra saw this decision as being consistent: what he taught about God through the Scriptures (that he provides and protects) was going to be how he lived out his life- especially as the king was watching them.
  - c) Ezra's fast entailed all the people abstaining from eating and asking the Lord- in his words, *implored*- for God to get them, their families, and all their stuff to Jerusalem safely. This was an exercise of humbling themselves before God and depending on him for his protection all along the journey that would take them four months. The journey was far and definitely entailed encounters with bandits, robbers, and hostile people. But Ezra was aware of the Scriptures too: in the Law, YHWH always told his people that he would fight for them- they didn't need a human king or army to protect them. In light of this, Ezra *felt* the need to fast and pray as well, and had the whole community do it together.
  - d) It seems to me that fasting in this situation was intimately tied with prayer. Ezra used this vocabulary to describe that they were praying: they sought from God safe journey (v. 21), they *implored* their God for this (v. 23), they were confident that God had *listened* to their *entreaty* (or earnest request, v. 23). So their fasting wasn't to somehow gain favor or twist God's arm or magically make something happen; it was to help to keep them urgent and persistent in their prayers. And even though in verse 31, Ezra acknowledged that they did face enemies and ambushes along the way. No other details are given, but YHWH *did* protect their lives and property all along the way. They made it to Jerusalem!
2. [Here's the final principle from this part again ...] Principle #4: This generation of reformed Christians expresses faith in God's providence by fasting and praying together.
- a) Context: There's many biblical examples and reasons why we should fast, but this is definitely one of them! It's a paradox, but it's something we do: we trust God's providence in the world; *therefore* we fast and pray for what we need, for strength to go through whatever he brings our way, for faith to obey him no matter what, for God to be glorified in whatever happens. As the Lord said in...
    - o John 15:7-8 (ESV): 7 *If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

As we hold onto Jesus by faith in him and as his words light a fire in our hearts, we pray and ask that he bears this kind of fruit of obedience and carrying out his will through us!
  - b) Context: Is there ever a more dire time than now in our world- with pandemic, social upheaval, and other crises- that we need to be strengthening our prayer lives- when God's church needs to be urgently and persistently imploring and making entreaties to him? Church, listen up! We need to wake up from our spiritual slumber and be dependent on God! Here's the paradox: we don't fast to reinforce how strong and valuable we are to God's work and world; we fast to reinforce how weak we truly are



and how much of a great privilege it is to be a part of God's providential plan for our generation.

- c) [Let me mention one final "life application" here for you...] **Life Application #4: Commit to fasting and praying for the church as we go through this rebuilding season.**
  - o Can I invite us to be fasting and praying together as a church? There are plenty of good resources about fasting online, so I won't go into the details here. In the past we have set aside Thursdays to fast as a church, and I'm inviting us to do this, especially in light of transitioning to hybrid church gatherings and this theme of "rebuilding" our church to be everything he wants us to be and to do everything he wants us to do! We're not going to be legalistic about it- just as the Lord convicts you about it, join us! We want to see us as a generation of reformed Christians who are passionate through God's Word, for God's church and God's cause, and remember- as we fast and pray- that it is only done by God's power and for his glory! *This is why we fast and pray!*

## **Conclusion**

**Transition:** Praise the Lord! I knew this would be a long sermon...but I believe this will be such an important message for us to take to heart as a church. Can we bring it all to the Lord now in prayer? May you respond to the Word of God and to the Spirit of God and...

***Be reformed by God's Word into action for God's cause.***

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