

THE BOOK OF EZRA

EZRA

Normal Campus Sermon Study - 9.6.2026

Leader's Corner

Ezra

Nehemiah 8:1–12
Hebrews 12:1-4

Main Idea: Life with God is often lived between what God has promised and what we currently see. In that tension, we can hold disappointment and hope together because the Bible's bigger story leads us to Jesus—and Jesus does not disappoint.

Main Passage: Nehemiah 8:1–12, with Hebrews 12:1–4 as a key supporting passage.

Main Practice: Name where you are living in the “already, but not yet,” then choose one faithful way to live with hope while you wait.

Leader Summary: Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of people returning from exile with enormous hopes for restoration. God is clearly at work, but their experience is also complicated, incomplete, and at times disappointing. That sounds a lot like life with God. We experience answered prayers and unanswered questions, joy and grief, progress and setbacks—sometimes simultaneously.

This study is an opportunity to give people permission to acknowledge both realities. Faith doesn't require pretending disappointment isn't real. Instead, Scripture invites us to locate our individual stories inside God's much bigger story. Nehemiah 8 gives us a picture of what God's people do in the middle: they gather, return to God's Word, weep honestly, worship joyfully, and remember that the joy of the Lord is their strength. Ultimately, our confidence isn't that every circumstance will resolve the way we hope; our confidence is Jesus—Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again.

Prayer and Praise

Worship Song Suggestions:

“Firm Foundation (He Won't)” — Maverick City Music / Cody Carnes

“Same God” — Elevation Worship

“Living Hope” — Phil Wickham

Opening Prayer:

Invite everyone to take a moment and think about one place where they have seen God's faithfulness recently—even if the situation itself isn't completely resolved.

Have several people briefly share.

Then pray together, thanking God for what He has already done and asking Him to help you trust Him in the places where you are still waiting.

Group Discussion

1. Life with God can contain seemingly opposite realities at the same time:

singing and crying

hoping and doubting

celebration and mourning

disappointment and hope

Which pairing best describes something you've experienced recently? Why?

2. Read Jeremiah 29:10–14. Jeremiah 29:11 is often quoted by itself, but these words were originally spoken to people experiencing exile. Their restoration would come—but they would also have to wait. What changes about the way you hear verse 11 when you read it in the context of verses 10–14? What promises do you see God making to His people? What does He not promise them? Where have you experienced a gap between what you hoped God would do and what He actually seemed to be doing?

3. What do God's people do in the middle? Read Nehemiah 8:1–12. Have the group identify everything they see the people doing in the passage. Which of those responses stands out most to you? Why? What does this scene teach us about how God's people can respond when life isn't everything we hoped it would be?

4. Put our story inside the bigger story. One of the repeated ideas from the sermon was:

Ezra is one story within a bigger story.

The Bible is one unified story that leads to Jesus.

And Jesus does not disappoint. He is our hope.

Read Hebrews 12:1–4. According to this passage, what helps us keep going when following Jesus becomes difficult or disappointing? What do you think it practically means to “keep our eyes on Jesus” when circumstances are pulling our attention somewhere else?

5. Living in the “already, but not yet” Through Jesus, God's Kingdom has already broken into the world—but we are still waiting for its complete restoration. Where are you currently experiencing some evidence of God's restoration—but also longing for more?

BONUS: If God intends to redeem His creation rather than abandon it, what might it look like for us to give people a glimpse of that coming restoration right now?

Think about your: home • neighborhood • workplace • school • relationships • church • community. Where could God use you to bring a small taste of His future hope and healing into the present?

Practice

Practice Together: Already / Not Yet

Give everyone two pieces of paper, two sticky notes, or simply two sides of a sheet.

On one, write: ALREADY

Where can I see evidence that God is already at work?

It can be something small. An answered prayer. Growth. Reconciliation. A relationship. Provision. A changing heart. Something God has begun restoring.

On the other, write: NOT YET

Where am I still waiting, hurting, disappointed, or longing for God to restore something?

Give everyone a few quiet minutes. Then invite people to share one or both with the group.

After each person shares, don't solve the "not yet." Instead, have another group member simply pray over them:

Thank God for the ALREADY.

Ask God for faith in the NOT YET.

Finish by reading Nehemiah 8:10 together: "Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the LORD is your strength!"

Practice This Week: Plant Something

Martin Luther is often associated with the idea that if he knew Christ were returning tomorrow, he would still plant a tree today.

Whether or not we know exactly what God will do next, we faithfully participate in His work today.

So this week's challenge: What is one "tree" you can plant?

Choose one tangible act of hope and restoration this week.

Encourage someone who is discouraged.

Repair something in a relationship.

Serve someone.

Invite someone to your table.

Give generously.

Show up for someone who is hurting.

Share the hope of Jesus.

Create something beautiful.

Take the faithful next step you've been postponing.

Don't wait for everything to be made right before doing something that reflects the Kingdom that is coming.

Further Study

For those who want to follow the bigger biblical story behind this week's message:

Genesis 12:1–3 — God's promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him.

Isaiah 11:1–10 — The promised King and God's vision of restoration.

Jeremiah 29:1–14 — God's promise to His people while they are still living in exile.

Ezra 1:1–11 — God begins bringing His people home and fulfilling His promise.

Nehemiah 8:1–12 — God's restored people gather around His Word and respond with both tears and joy.

Hebrews 12:1–4 — How God's people endure: fixing our eyes on Jesus.

Revelation 21:1–5; 22:1–5, 20 — The destination of the biblical story: God dwelling with His people and making all things new.

One question to carry into further study: How does knowing where God's story is ultimately going change the way you live faithfully in the unfinished parts of your story today?