

# The Power of Unity, Praise, and Generosity: Ezra 3:1-7

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome to Ontario Community Church, where we're dedicated to encouraging, equipping, and engaging lives for Christ. Located in Ontario, Oregon, Pastor Patrick Daly preaches insightful sermons from the Word of God, offering practical applications for modern living.

We're delighted to share this sermon with you. Well, good morning, everyone. It is great to be with you this morning as we are continuing our sermon series, this biblical exposition of the book of Ezra.

We have learned so much about the moving of the Holy Spirit. In the Spirit, the heart of the King of Cyrus, the Gentile King, and how the Holy Spirit moved and stirred the hearts and the spirits of over 40,000 families to come out of their 70-year exile.

The people of God traveled a 500-mile journey across the desert, with over 5,000 vessels that were once stolen. They were rightfully returned with thousands of animals to return to Jerusalem.

All of this, what's leading up to today, goes to show the power of the God that we worship, the God that we love, and that we serve.

[ 1 : 14 ] Just as God has spoken and moved in the hearts and the minds, and the spirits of all these people, God continues to speak to us today. Amen.

God is living inactive, much like the word of God is living inactive. With the moving of the people of God, all of these people, they returned to Jerusalem and they settled in.

So we've now arrived to Ezra Chapter 3, where we will learn about the rebuilding of the altar. Well, wait a minute. I thought Ezra was about the rebuilding of the temple.

Well, what's happening in Chapter 3 is, they had decided to rebuild the altar first. Why? They wanted to worship God once again, first and foremost.

They wanted to do that before the laying the foundation of the temple. We're going over the first seven verses of Ezra Chapter 3, where we will see that the people of God came together as one, which is another way of saying in unity, under the leadership of Jeshua and Zerubbabel to rebuild the altar so they could once again partake in their services, their burnt offerings.

[ 2 : 24 ] Such a project, it requires lots of people, but also the movement of the Holy Spirit and the stirring of people's hearts. There has to be a need at times for specialists and people who can contribute to such a project as this.

For many of us who might have worked on a project before, such as building of a house or maybe fixing of a car, sometimes you need specialists to help contribute to your project.

Sometimes you need some additional help. I've watched before shows, how many of you watch Pawn Stars before or maybe the auction roadhouse?

We have to call in a specialist and they're like, I have no idea how much this coin is worth. I have no idea what this Pokemon card, how much that is worth or this watch that looks funny.

You have to call specialists. What we see here in Ezra is that there is this call to have specialists who are working in there. Before we go any further, what I'd like for us to do, let's open in prayer, let's pray to the Lord and we pray that the Holy Spirit will be with us.

[ 3 : 32 ] To stir our hearts to know Jesus Christ, to enter into a relationship with Him, to grow in Jesus Christ, not just learning about the history and observations, but to grow as what it means to be a Christian.

So let's pray together. Gracious Father, we thank you for giving us the opportunity here to come together, united as the body of Christ to worship together, to sing praises to your Holy Name, and also to listen to what your Word has to say for, Father God, we are grateful that your Word is living

and active.

We are grateful that you are not a dead God, but you are the living God who continues to work in and through people today. We pray that we may follow your directive, your mission, and you follow your Word.

We pray that we may not be afraid of what people may say or think about, who we are as Christians and who we are as Christ. We pray that we can stand firm in the Word of God, but also the ability to balance grace, the love of your Son Jesus Christ, and the truth of the Word of God.

May we learn the importance of today, of how important it is for us to come together, united as the body of Christ together, whether that is to rebuild something or to build your church.

[ 4 : 50 ] May we contribute our time and our talent and our treasure, not only to literally build up the church, but to continue in the work of ministry, Father. You call all of us to be saved, to grow in faith with you, and to be moved to do good in your Holy Name.

So in all of this, be with us, send your Holy Spirit down to be with us as we go forth in Ezra chapter 3. It is in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God that we pray together.

Can I get an amen? Amen. So we have the significance of the altar. We're going to go ahead and put that. That's just kind of a representation. I know with finding images, it's always kind of a weird one, right?

But the building of the altar is something that is of great significance. In your notes, you'll see Exodus chapter 27, verses 1 through 8. It provides instructions for how to build the altar.

Leviticus 9, 24 shows that the altar was a place for burnt offerings to the Lord. This was a way for the people of God to offer their sacrifices, so to speak, burnt offerings to the Lord.

[ 5 : 52 ] The people of God, they wanted to get back in the rhythm of their services, so to speak, to get back into observing their festivals. This would be like us, if we were not able to go to church for a while.

It would be as if there was a time that we couldn't come together. Wouldn't there be an excitement? Or maybe there's this movement in your heart to be able to come back together and to get back in the rhythm of doing church life?

That hasn't happened before. Has it? I'm being funny here, okay? But in that, you can think of the people of God, right?

How excited they are to get back into their services, right? And you'll see that there are altars that are built out through Scripture, just as in Genesis and in Exodus. We're not going to go through all of those verses, but this is just for your information.

We see in verse one, right? You have the children of Israel, right? They were in towns, they gathered together as one in Jerusalem. And that's something that is very significant because they are coming together, united.

[ 6 : 55 ] They're not divided, they're coming together to rebuild. They are ready to rebuild this altar so that they can worship the Lord and make their offerings to God. We see that these people were coming together as one under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Josiah, right?

Ready to offer their sacrifices to the Lord, or Jesuit, excuse me. We go into verse three then, which says, they set the altar in its place. What does it say?

What was on them? For fear was on them, right? Because of the what? The peoples of the lands, right? They offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings of morning and evening, so they were getting back in the rhythm of doing things.

And I find it very interesting that the people were afraid. They came back out of exile, they're starting to rebuild the altar, they're going to rebuild the temple, but yet they were afraid in this. It makes me think of times where maybe we have felt afraid before.

Maybe there has been a time for us, and I know there's been a time for us, where we couldn't come to church, right? And we started going back to church, and maybe we got afraid that we wouldn't be able to go again.

[ 8 : 05 ] Or maybe there was a time where you have felt that in going to church, or being a Christian, or living out the faith, maybe you've been concerned about what your friends, or your family may feel or think about who you are as a Christian.

It just goes to show that, look, these people are people, right? They have regular emotions just like you and I do. And despite the fear that they've had, they kept going with the rebuilding of the altar.

We find often in Scripture that the Lord commands His people, His prophets, and even for us to not be afraid. That's a very big encouragement for us.

Even when there are people who may say things, or do things, we remain rooted in our faith. We remain rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ.

I'm reminded of Joshua 1-9 which says, Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. [9:09] And even if that means you might have been in exile, or you are returning from exile, God is going to be with you. For us today, we might have been through a season, right?

There's, you hear that common saying, there's hills and valleys that we experience, but God is there with us in the highs and in the lows of life. I can imagine that when you're beginning to build, or rebuild an altar, right?

Whether you're building a church, or you're building community together, it's very easy for us to sometimes get uneasy. Sometimes we do get afraid at times. Let us remember what Psalm 27 verse 1 says, That the Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?

The Lord is a stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? It's a great reminder that even the people of God have got, they got afraid. It is in times where we are vulnerable, and now listen here, in the times where we are vulnerable, and the times we are afraid, that's a time for us to lean into the Lord, to trust in the Lord, and to not be afraid, trust in Him.

No matter what's happening. We go to the next couple of verses where we have verse 4. They kept the Feast of Booths as it is written, and burnt offerings by number according to the rule, as each day required.

[10:29] And this is kind of, I tried to find some images of the representation of the Feast of Booths. And the idea that when we're seeing the Feast of Booths, this representation here, it was a reminder for the Jewish people when God led them out of Egypt.

They had their Booths, or their tents, if you will. They were trusting in God as they were going out. So that's something that I think is really awesome with that. Let's see here.

Verse 7 goes on to say that they gave money to the masons and the carpenters. Food and drink and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea to Jopah according to the grant that they had from Cyrus the king of Persia.

I love that language, right? The grant that they receive, right? So grants happened back in those times as well, just like there's grants that happen today. I think that's just a really cool thing. We're seeing here not only the raising of money, the free will offerings, but we're talking about people who are all contributing, even if they're not, people who are all contributing, even if they need to go to specialists to have something done completed.

And you'll see that in this final verse, right? There's so much that is happening here. You have the people of God that are coming together as one for this big project, the rebuilding of the altar, the needing of specialists who have specialized knowledge.

[12:00] This is getting people to help with the project at hand. And so we have, you'll see in your notes, there are three big lessons that we can learn in here.

Three big lessons, three key lessons from Ezra, chapter three, verse one through seven. The first one in here is to step out boldly in action.

The people of God stepped out boldly to rebuild the altar, despite the fear of others. And in the same way, we too should step out boldly and inspire action for the glory of God.

This is where, again, the people, right, they're going out boldly to rebuild the altar. It's connected with how the Holy Spirit stirred the spirits of the people to return to their homeland and to be strong and courageous.

And even though they might have been afraid, right, afraid of what people in the surrounding areas might have said or done, they stayed intentionally focused on building or rebuilding the altar.

[13:03] And that is a lesson that we can think of today. It's directly applicable. That even though there may be times where we may be in exile, there may be times where we're away from the body of Christ, there may be times where we may feel separated from God or separated from other people.

Lean into the Lord, right? It's thinking, look, do not be afraid to step out boldly in action. Do not be afraid to trust in the Lord when there's trials and tribulations in your life.

And if you ever are facing any sort of adversity or people who are against you, you continue in what you are doing. You keep on that trajectory of being strong and courageous in the Lord.

Continue on the good work that you're doing. You don't just, can you imagine if all of these, the people of God who are returning from Babylon, that they were afraid and they're like, you know what, let's go back.

That's not what the text says, right? So it goes to show that they kept with their project, despite being afraid. And in the same way, I cannot emphasize this enough, we continue on the path and the trajectory of what God has placed before us, right?

[14:21] To love the Lord with all your heart, right? Trust in the Lord, lean not on your own understanding, to grow in faith going from the spiritual milk of the Word and growing into solid food, or being moved to do good in the name of Jesus Christ and serving others.

There's so many ways that, so many, it's all part of our spiritual journey in Christ. And we continue on that. We don't just turn around and go back. We keep moving forward. The next slide here is a unified community effort, the people of God united to rebuild the altar.

So in the same way for us, unity in Christ and doing God's work is powerful and necessary for accomplishing His will. Just as it says in the first couple of verses in Ezra chapter three, the people of God came together as one.

And for us as Christians, we can take encouragement from that. To be united in Christ in love and in unity. You'll hear me say this many times that there's a great balance that we have to have with grace and truth, right?

We have the grace of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the truth of the Word. And it's this great balance between the two. And in doing this, what an encouragement for us as Christians, as the body of Christ, to be united.

[15:49] And I'm reminded, you'll see in your notes, right, that the same way that the Jewish people came together, they contributed to the rebuilding of the altar and eventually the temple. We see that in Acts 4:32, there's something very similar that happens there.

It says in here, and I'll read it to you, the full number of those who believed were one heart and soul. And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own. So basically they're all contributing, right?

Just like we're seeing in the Bible, just like we're seeing in Ezra, right? The free will offerings, right? The time, talent, and treasure, they're contributing together in the early church, just like the rebuilding of the altar here.

And in the same way, when we're considering our contributions of our time, our talent, and our treasure, when we're giving according to our ability, we can have a greater impact in the name of Christ.

And the greater impact is to reach the lost, right? To grow together in Christ, and to have a voice in the community for Christ, to be able to build the church, because the church is a beacon of hope.

[16:58] It also reminds me in 1 Corinthians 12, 12 through 14, as the body is one, it has many members, some of you have heard about this, right? Members of the body, right? So it is with Christ.

In one spirit, we're all baptized into one body. It's a great encouragement for us as Christians, be reminded, you've heard this from Scripture, you've probably heard it as a famous saying that, a house divided cannot stand.

We have got to come together as Christians in love and unity. Think of the world and how much division there is happening, with media, social media, all of the unfortunate, terrible things that are happening in the world.

That is an encouragement for us to share in the light and the love of Jesus Christ to others.

Because when we're considering culture, I don't think of a lot of, and it's sad, I, can you think of a good article that's come out recently?

And if you can, that's great. But how many bad articles, in comparison to one good article, right? In that, that gives us as Christians the opportunity to share in the love of Christ, to encourage others, and to be united.

[18:13] Let's not contribute to division among the body. Let us come together. Ephesians chapter four, verse three, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, the peace that comes from Jesus Christ.

And for many of us, we have come to know Christ, right? Look, how we've all come to Jesus Christ is different. Some of you may remember your former life before you came to know the Lord, before God molded you into who you are.

Today, many of us come from different denominational backgrounds. Some of us may have been raised with different theological perspectives and all these things. And what matters is that we, as the body of Christ, are on a journey together in love and in unity, balancing grace and truth.

Let's go to that next slide. Yes, commitment to God's word. The people of God were committed to the law and building the altar, right? For us today, we are to be committed to God's word and to build up the church.

The people of God followed the law of Moses, right? They continued the burnt offerings to the Lord in the same way we're not gonna be doing burnt offerings. And I know they're...

[ 19 : 24 ] No, we're not doing that, right? But in all of that, our commitment, though, is to the word of God, right? We have the living and active word that can help people come to know who Christ is, help us to grow in faith.

In Joshua 1-8, it says that the book of the law shall not depart from you, right? This is the Lord speaking to Joshua. You shall meditate it on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

And in the same way that the Lord was speaking to Joshua, right? God speaks to us that we should read and study and apply the word of God to our own lives. We have Psalm 119, 105, the first verse.

The famous verse that your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. You turn on a flashlight in a dark room, right? Or you may literally have turned on a lamp before.

How much it illuminates a room. And think of that as the light of Christ. Maybe think of the room as how God has brightened who you are.

[ 20 : 34 ] Or think of how the light of Christ, the truth of Christ, the love of Christ, how it is a beacon of hope, it is a light for others. To come out of darkness.

I mean, what a powerful imagery we can think of. And so in all of this, you have also James 122. Be doers of the word, not hearers, right?

In all of this, be reminded first and foremost, you come to faith in Jesus Christ and faith. In all of that, be on a path of growing and doing good in the name of Christ, being those doers of the word. And in all of this, right? We learn about the construction of the altar, the burnt offerings, the sacrifices to the Lord, the people were observing their festivals. We learn about the courage to worship the Lord.

The people of God being united and following what scripture had to say in their time. Obviously a lot of time has passed and we have the New Testament. They didn't have the New Testament.

[ 21 : 33 ] But it becomes with the question that you might ask yourself, all right, what can we do with this information? How can we apply this to our own lives?

What are some actionable steps? We call this the application. So the first thing that comes up is, prioritize worshiping the Lord. Make worshiping the Lord a priority in your life.

And that means worshiping the Lord personally and corporately, right, as the body of Christ coming together. We've got to prioritize praising the name of Jesus Christ worshiping the Lord.

We've got to see to it that we are worshiping Jesus Christ praying to the Lord and being an active participant in the life of the church. It's very interesting and it may kind of go against what, when you're reading Ezra, they're making this big effort to rebuild the temple.

Why build the altar first? It's so that they can praise the Lord, making it a priority for them to worship God.

[ 22 : 37 ] And what we can do as the body of Christ is prioritizing worship, worshiping the Lord.

Many of you know Matthew 18, verse 20, which says that when two or three are gathered in my name in the name of Christ, there I am, there Christ is among us, right?

Or Psalm 95, 6, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our maker. Or you may know Hebrews 10, 25, which says to not neglect meeting together, right?

So there's this encouragement for us to prioritize worshiping the living God, praising and worshiping coming together as the body of Christ.

And let's not forget, personally worshiping the Lord, your prayer life. How is your prayer life recently?

How is reading your Bible? I know for some of us, we might have many Bibles. I'm very guilty of this. I have, I don't know how many Bibles don't ask me that question.

[ 23 : 43 ] I have to count one day. But you might have a few Bibles that are collecting dust on the shelf. Or maybe you have a Bible that's been beaten. It's been worn. It's been used because you've used it.

Or maybe it's been handed to you. These are things to think about. So worship God, connect with him, but also worship as part of the body of Christ, the spiritual community, the church. The next one is to face our fears with faith in Christ. When we are afraid of what others may say or do, may we draw closer to God and trust in him.

This is the second thing that we can learn from. This is, we can apply. We see from Ezra chapter 3 that the people were afraid of the peoples in the land. This makes me think again of how sometimes we can get afraid.

It's natural. And if you haven't been afraid before, then you're a stronger person than I am. But there are many times we get afraid. Just like in sometimes we get afraid as children of, you know, we get afraid of the dark.

[ 24 : 45 ] And some of us adults might still be afraid of the dark. But in reality, though, it's natural for us to have those moments where we are afraid. And be motivated, be encouraged to not be afraid.

But in those vulnerable moments, that's when you lean in, when you trust in the Lord with everything that you are. The Bible is full of so many times where scripture says, do not be afraid or do not worry.

And how easy it is for us to get anxious or to worry about things that are going on in the world, our own lives, our family, just the other day. Last Sunday, I got a phone call.

My dad was having chest pain. He was right after service. He thought he was having a heart attack. It was just indigestion. He needed carbonated water.

I got anxious at that moment. I got afraid. I'm like, I got to drive all the way to Winamaka, which where he was at, what, four hours away.

[ 25 : 49 ] It's natural to have those moments, but in times like that, you've got to pray to the Lord. You've got to connect with him. Isaiah 41.10 is a great encouragement when the Lord is saying, fear not.

Ooh, that's beautiful words, but it's not easy to do, right? Fear not, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you, because look, God's on our side. Psalm 56, 3, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you. Well, I'd like to be able to say that statement. And I hope you do as well.

John 14, 27, right, where Christ says, peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, but as Christ as I give to you.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid. And that's just a few examples of how we are to trust in God in those vulnerable moments.

[ 26 : 49 ] And it's natural to get afraid, but in those moments, again, trust in the Lord. The next one is to build and strengthen church community.

Become an active member of your church community, encouraging and supporting fellow believers. The third thing here is, look, just as the people of God came together and participated, they became active in their sacrifices at the altar, it's an encouragement for us to participate in the life of the church.

Maybe the Holy Spirit has been tugging at your heart, or you felt us stirring. I always think it's such a cool language, right? I think of like stirring of a drink or something, right?

But maybe the Holy Spirit has been stirring in your heart, in your mind, in your spirit. We are to build up one another, to encourage one another, and to live in harmony with one another.

Galatians 6-2 tells us, bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For Thessalonians 5-11 says, encourage one another, and build up one another.

[ 27 : 55 ] In Romans 12-16, it says, live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. So not only is it talking about living in harmony with brothers and sisters in Christ, but be the light of Christ when you're associating with others.

It's an encouragement that we are not only to just attend church and worship the living God, and hear the message from scripture, but to be active participants in the church, the life of the church, and to go out into the world and do good in the name of Christ.

We're to build up the church community, but we're also to be active within the community. In our interactions with others, it could be at work, it could be at school.

Even if you're taking classes online, you can still exhibit the light and love of Christ to others. Be active within our city, those we interact with.

I mean, I know one guy, a good friend of mine, if he's watching this, he's going to get a good kick out of it. I have a friend of mine who is very introverted. He does not like leaving the house.

[ 29 : 01 ] He works online, and he just stays away from people. But you know what he does? He orders groceries online, and they deliver him. They deliver the groceries to him.

Well, even at that, you can still exhibit the light of Christ. Whether you're an extrovert, and you love people, or whether you're an introvert, and maybe you interact with only a couple people, you still can do that.

And so ask yourself the question, how are you building and strengthening the church community? And how are you impacting the community, the city, others, your neighbors for Christ?

The next slide is to make a commitment to the Word of God. Commit to reading, to studying, and implying, and living out the Word to your daily life.

There's transformation that comes from the Word of God. To live it out is just remarkable. From the spiritual aspect, people that don't know the Lord are very quick to know, you're a Christian.

[ 30 : 06 ] There's something very different about you. They can't put their finger on it. But you've got that joy. You've got that peace. You've got that love. Just think about that.

Just as the people of God, they were committed in Ezra. They were committed to the burnt offerings. Ask Christians today, participate in the life of the church. But also, be committed to reading, studying, and applying the Word of God.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for us to read the Word of God. It being living and active.

For many of us, we may read the same scripture. But God speaks to us in so many different ways. Different moments in our lives, different time periods, because God continues to speak to us.

I can't really do that if I read Shakespeare. I'm sorry. Shakespeare is a great author, but it's not the Word of God.

[ 31 : 13 ] I can read Shakespeare, and I know what's going on there. Well, at least I try to with the language thing. But with the Word of God, situations, times of joy, times of triumph, promotion, even times of crisis and trials or testing of your faith, God speaks to you.

The next slide we have is to commit to doing good in the name of Christ. Be encouraged to engage the church and the community through service and sharing in your faith.

I've mentioned before the 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 1 through 4 as the simple gospel, right? I'm a Christian. I believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That's a pretty simple way of explaining your faith. You can do John 3.16. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Or you can explain how God has worked in and through your life.

There's many ways that we can do this. And so take time to think of your time, talent, and treasure.

[ 32 : 25 ] I want you to think that in everything that you do, you do it for the glory of God. Think about that.

In everything that you do, do it in excellence. What's perfect? No. Do it to the best of your ability. Just like how we read in Ezra that people gave according to their ability. Do the best of your ability in the name of Christ, right? Something for us to think about.

Do an excellence together as a church. When we're working to build up the church body, imagine the impact that we can have on the community, on our own lives growing for Christ, people that don't know the Lord, the working of the Holy Spirit and other people.

In one of the, for the board here, you might have gotten my paper that I wrote about, the Gather to Scatter Conference.

[ 33 : 28 ] And one of the really incredible perspectives was talking about those who go to church and those who are not yet going to church. And I just thought that was a great way of looking at it.

Because I'm so used to seeing believer and unbeliever, right? But they're not yet coming to the Lord. And that's just a different way of looking at it, right? Think of people who are not yet Christian or those who are not yet a believer, how we can exhibit the love of Christ through service and in sharing our testimony, sharing in the gospel message to others.

Every single one of us has been given so much. God gives us everything you consider, you should consider how to give back to God.

Colossians, we just did a series on that. Colossians chapter 3, verse 23 through 24, is a great encouragement. Whatever you do, work as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord, you receive the inheritance as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ. In everything that we do, we should do in excellence for the glory of God. In 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 10, it says that as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.

[ 34 : 49 ] Second Corinthians 9, 7 tells us each one must give as he has decided in his heart. Not reluctantly or under compulsion, right?

It's the famous God loves a cheerful giver. So think about assessing all that you have in giving according to your ability. Think about how you can share in the gospel message, the words of your testimony.

The next slide that we have is to praise the Lord for his faithfulness with gratitude. I know that's a long one, right? With gratitude and thankfulness. Never stop praising and worshiping the Lord. That's another way of saying it. God is faithful. He never changes. Be thankful and be grateful. Let us never stop praising and worshiping our God, right?

It's not just worshiping God in the church, but also being grateful and thankful for what God has given to us. You have another day.

[ 35 : 48 ] Do you realize as you are here, God has given you another gift of life, another day, another day to praise him, but also to focus on what really matters.

That's something for us. It's always, it hits home when you think about that. But also the faithfulness of God recognizing that God has given you life.

And when you look out in nature, I know it's difficult to look out in nature with the smoke and everything, but when you look out in nature, you can see God's creation, the goodness of God and the mountains, the rivers, the valleys, but also the goodness of God and other people.

And that's wonderful for us to observe. So be encouraged to observe. How is God working in your life? How has God worked in your life?

Maybe take inventory on how God has worked in your life. That's a way for us to be thankful. First Thessalonians 5.16, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks.

[ 36 : 58 ] Let us praise the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord. For our God is good, amen. His steadfast love, right? As it says in Psalm 106, His steadfast love endures forever.

Being a Christian means we are saved by grace through faith, but we're to grow. It's the beginning of our spiritual walk in Christ, to live and to love like Christ and having God at the center of our life.

And so in all of this, we can see that with the return of the exiles, from Babylon going back to Jerusalem, the people of God were dedicated to coming together in unity to rebuild the altar. They were dedicated to worshiping the living God and to continue their services, offering birth sacrifices to the Lord. And for us today, we should be encouraged to come together, united as the body of Christ to build up the community, the community of Christ, of believers, but also doing good in our community outside the walls of the church.

The church is made up of people. It's about relationships that we make. It's about celebrating together. It's about praising the living God. It's also about encouraging one another.

[ 38 : 17 ] It is being there for one another in trials and in tribulations. May we as the church body have the courage to boldly step out and continue to worship the living God no matter what people say or what people do.

For those of us who do not know Jesus Christ, may you be encouraged to know Jesus Christ by knowing the simple gospel. It's that first Corinthians, chapter 15 verses one through four.

The death, the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that all of this happened according to the scriptures. It's recognizing that Jesus Christ died for our sins on the cross, that he was buried and he rose again on the third day.

It's just like that song says, Jesus paid it all. Jesus paid it all in full. If you know the Lord, may you have the courage to grow in faith.

It can be scary to grow in faith at times. You have to wrestle with the text. You're like, what does this mean? What does this proverb mean? One of my favorite ones when I was a teenager is consider the ant.

[ 39 : 30 ] You have to observe the ant and learn from the ant. I'm like, that's a weird one, right? One of my favorite proverbs, it talks about slothful people, saying that a lazy person is one who gets tired as they're lifting a spoon to eat.

It's in proverbs. I don't know the exact proverb, but look it up sometime. It's actually a really hilarious one. You can think the imagery of someone who's so lazy that they're getting tired to eat.

But in all that, the point of this is that as you're growing in the Lord, you learn more scripture and you'll have to wrestle with it. But look, aren't there times where we learn a new subject in study and we have to wrestle with concepts like math, right?

I'm not picking on my math people, right? Or English, right? Or if you're learning a second language, you have to struggle with different concepts and things. It's no different than when we're learning the word of God.

You're like, what is, what's with the Nephilim, right? You might have that or whatever it is on your own spiritual journey.

[ 40 : 40 ] But in all of this, may you have the courage to grow in faith. There'll be times where you'll wrestle with theology, right? Or all the oligies, Christology, or eschatology, right?

And in any case, balance that grace and truth and be encouraged to read and study the word. And for those of you who are doing the first two things, may you be moved to be an ambassador for Christ, going out into the world and making a difference.

In leadership and your interactions with your work in the marketplace or in whatever it is you do.

May you be a representative for Christ, telling people of what you believe in.

But also being an example, that's a huge one. Some people, it's just how you conduct yourself, how you interact with people, your own neighbor.

If you see someone who needs help and assistance, how do you help with that? People see that, people recognize that. May we all be encouraged to be a part of the life of the church and celebrate God's faithfulness.

[ 41 : 47 ] For God is faithful, he is holy, God is just, and he is righteous, God is good. And even though there may be times we may be afraid, or we may be afraid of what others say or think or do, may we come together, united in Christ, and remain focused on the things of God.

Focus on the mission of Jesus Christ, the great commandment, to love God and to love others, the great commission to make disciples and to baptize believers.

And may we be able to contribute to the building of the church. Think of all of this, just as we have learned from Ezra. Chapter three, verses one through seven.

They came together, they built the altar, and even though they were afraid, they continued with that. And they also got some specialists when needed, right?

So may we learn from this today, let's pray together. Gracious Father, we thank you for the lessons and the actionable steps that we have, but most importantly, we're thankful for your word.

[ 42 : 59 ] We pray, Father, that if there's any division among us, may we set those aside and may we come together in unity as the body of Christ. And I'm talking about, Father, setting aside the things that are secondary.

May we focus on the primary things, the death, burial, and resurrection of your Son. May we focus on the primary things that we are to come together, sharing in the gospel to other people.

Where to grow together in you. Where to do good in the name of your Son. We pray that we may follow your direction in the guidance of the Holy Spirit for our very lives.

May we, Father, as the church body, may we never be afraid of what people may say or think when it comes to us being a Christian. And even when we go out into the world and our interactions, even if we're in a situation where we might not be able to share in our words, we can still share through our actions.

We pray that we can be faithful to you, faithful to your word. We pray that just like what we're finding in Ezra, that we too can participate in the life of the church and in celebrations, just like our Easter and Christmas celebrations.

[ 44 : 23 ] May we also consider our time and our talent and our treasure and how we can contribute to you according to our ability. Father, we pray that your Holy Spirit will just move in everyone's lives here and those that are online.

We pray that as we sing this last song, may we lift up a shout of praise. May we praise your Holy name. May we be thankful for who you are and do all of this with a heart full of gratitude towards

you.

We thank you so much and we say all of this in the name of Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of salvation. Can I get an amen? Thank you for tuning in to the Ontario Community Church sermon podcast.

For more about our church and how you can get involved or support our mission, please visit [ontariocommunitychurch.org](https://ontariocommunitychurch.org). May God's blessings be with you.