

*Quiet Power*  
*Ezra 7:6-10*  
*Bellevue*  
*April 26, 2026*

Please open your Bible with me to Ezra, chapter 7.

Most of you know the story of The Wizard of Oz. Dorothy finds herself in a strange land, but she's not wandering aimlessly. She has a destination. She must follow the yellow brick road, she must make it to the Emerald City. She must find the one who has the power to send her home. Every step she takes is driven by that vision of where she wants to be.

In a similar way, every young follower of Christ has, in their mind, a preferred destination, a place they would like to end up one day. We want to do what God put us on the planet to do. As Ephesians 2:10 says:

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Today, at the end of the service, we'll recognize our fresh batch of graduating seniors—those who are now ready to launch into the world, to find God's yellow brick road, eager to seek out those good works that He prepared in advance for them to do. If you know the Lord, then you want your life to matter. You want to become the kind of person He has in mind for you to be.

But here's the question: *How do you find His will for your life?* How do you move from where you are, to where God wants you to be? Today, we'll get some clues from the passage we explore. In Ezra 7, we're introduced to this man whose life carried a kind of quiet power. Multiple times in this book, we will see the same expression used to describe him. The Word say:

*"And the gracious hand of the Lord was upon him."*

*"And the gracious hand of the Lord was upon him."*

*"And the gracious hand of the Lord was upon him."*

Once Ezra enters the story, that phrase shows up six times. It's like the Lord is taking a yellow highlighter to those words, making sure you don't miss the secret behind Ezra's influence, the reason why he became an all-star leader. As we examine his life, we will see that it was really quite simple. He mastered the basics.

Let's see what those are. Let's see why the gracious hand of the Lord was upon him.

Let's read Ezra 7:6–10.

**Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he requested because the hand of the Lord his God was on him. <sup>7</sup> Some of the Israelites, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants accompanied him to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.**

**<sup>8</sup> Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, during the seventh year of the king. <sup>9</sup> He began the journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month and arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month since the gracious hand of his God was on him. <sup>10</sup> Now Ezra had determined in his heart to study the law of the Lord, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezra 7:6–10**

In this passage, we see how a person can gain the quiet power of God, how they fulfill the purpose He has for them. As I heard it said when I was young. “This Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible. So much of our success in ministry is related to our commitment to Scripture. Ezra was a man of the Word.

First, take notice of v. 6, as we are first introduced to Ezra. We learn nothing about his physical qualities, unlike King Saul, when we first meet him in 1 Samuel, we are told that he stood head and shoulders higher than all others his age. We are told that Saul was the best looking guy in all the land. When we read that section of 1 Samuel about Saul, we can feel the force of the foreshadowing—that this young man was probably going to be arrogant. Because God gave him a superior frame, he likely won't feel the ; the need to develop his interior life.

And sadly that is exactly what plays out. King Saul was like a firework that turned out to be a dud, and from his failure, the principle comes forth:

**Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. 1 Sam. 16:7**

Young people, I know that I covered it last week, but I want to say this one more time in case you missed it. The world you are about to inherit will applaud you for having smooth skin, bulging biceps, and toned calves. What the world won't reward is your secret obedience to the word of God, which will keep you from sin.

The famous artist, Michelangelo, was asked about the secret of his genius, especially in the way that sculpted his famous statue of David, considered the greatest masterpiece of his time. Michelangelo responded by said “Oh, it was simple. I just took that big rock and removed everything that is not David.”

In a similar way, the young people God puts his gracious hand upon, are those who examine their hearts every day, and remove everything that isn't Jesus. The sooner you begin the sculpting, the better it's going to be.

Ezra was a person who focused more on who he was inside than outside. And the passage today tells us that he led the trip from Babylon to Jerusalem—900 miles with a slow-moving caravan. The group contained a mix of men, women, and children. For four months, they traveled down their version of the yellow brick road, and finally arrived at the edge of the Holy City. Verses 6-9 provide those details, but then, in v.10, we come upon this clear description of Ezra:

**Now Ezra had determined in his heart to study the law of the Lord, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezer 7:10–11**

He studied Scripture.

He applied Scripture.

He taught Scripture.

It's that simple. He studied the Word. He obeyed the Word. He taught the Word. It doesn't get any more basic than that, but I want to carefully consider why each is important.

*1. Ezra studied Scripture for many years.*

The phrase, he “determined in his heart” means he formed a secret discipline.

In fact, if you look back up at v.6, notice that this man was described as “a scribe skilled in the law of Moses.” That word for skilled, in the Hebrew language, means fast. He was a man fast in the Law of Moses—the law of Moses meaning the early portions of Scripture that God had provided at that point in history.

He was a man who had hidden God's Word in his heart so well, for so long, that now the Word lived on the top of his tongue.

There is a verse, Psalm 45:1, which reads:

***My heart is moved by a noble theme. as I recite my verses to the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.***

What can a skillful writer do that an unskilled writer can't? A skilled one, when she sits down to put words to page, those words flow. The longer you work in the medium of words, the faster they come to you. It's like a person who has put in their 10,000 hours in their craft—take piano for example—someone who has played the piano night after night, day after day, eventually they can sit without music and play a vast number of songs. They can write songs. They can hear the music in their head.

The same is true for those who work in the medium of Scripture. When I look back on my early years of writing sermons, in my 20s, it took me twice, maybe three times as long to craft a message. Today, I am so much faster than I was. Why? Because I've done this now for 25 years. Like a golfer who goes to the driving range day after day, year after year, eventually you get the hang of it. So it is with the Word of God.

A young man said to me not long ago that he was doubting whether God is real. I said, "Is that so? What are you doing about that? What are you reading right now?"

"Nothing. I don't read."

"Well, how do you expect to be deep in the things of God, when your feet aren't even in the water. "

What is the water? The Word of God. And the more we study Scripture, the faster it flows from the tongue. What you practice becomes part of you.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul challenges every believer to be proactive in putting on the full armor of God. Among the military pieces he mentions, most are for the purpose of defense: the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith. These things keep us from being impaled by the Enemy.

But then he presents one offensive weapon we have, for fighting off the enemy. It was the weapon of choice for Jesus: the word of God which is the sword of the Spirit. And when the Devil tried to tempt Jesus early on, Jesus quoted Scripture multiple times to back the devil down. He wielded the sword of the Spirit.

That Greek word for sword in Ephesians 6, is not the word that describes the big, long swords we see in movies. The sword of the Spirit is not a 3 foot sword. No the word Paul uses describes a short sword, like a dagger that was used in close combat. My son Max went on a mission trip to Spain a few months ago, and they ended up in the shop that designed the swords for the Lord of the Rings movies, and he bought me this sword.

Do you see how short it is. In order to take down an enemy with this, you can't just whirl it around. No, this kind of sword requires precision. Skill, in order to be effective.

That's the way it is with the Word. And when it says that Ezra was skilled in the Law of Moses, it means that he had logged many hours in the Word. He knew how to use it.

Do you want to be the kind of person God uses? Do you hope that the gracious hand of God will be upon you? Then seek to become highly proficient with the Word. Get fast with it.

## 2. Ezra applied Scripture.

**Now Ezra had determined in his heart to study the law of the Lord, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezer 7:10–11**

Even though this is just two words, here we find the real key to Ezra's success as a leader. He did more than merely memorize the Word of God. He actively looked for ways to use the knowledge he had obtained. In other words, he would read Scripture and then ask himself: how does this change how I live in the next 12 hours? How should this inform my decision making?

Early in the book of 1 Samuel, we meet the two sons of the prophet Eli. Their names were Hophni and Phineas. They are, unfortunately, the picture of the pastor's kids gone wild. Rotten eggs. It wasn't because they didn't learn the Word of God. They grow up under their father's preaching. They were constantly visiting the temple, and yet, the Word of God was not sinking in, not affecting the way they went about their lives. At one point, Eli catches them in sin and says to them:

**Why are you doing these things? I have heard about your evil actions from all these people. <sup>24</sup>No, my sons, the news I hear the Lord's people spreading is not good...but they would not listen to their father. 1 Sa 2:23–24**

Spoiler alert: The story doesn't end well for these two boys. They had all the knowledge they needed, but they didn't apply it.

Spiritually speaking, one of the most dangerous places to be in life is "in the know" but not "in the way." Read Scripture from start to finish and you'll find countless examples of people who had knowledge but no application. Like those boys who wouldn't listen to their father, so we can hear the Word of God, and still pay very little attention to it.

James 1:22: Be doers of the Word and not hearers only. Ezra studied the Word and then obeyed the Word. This brings us to point 3.

3. Ezra taught the Scriptures.

**Now Ezra had determined in his heart to study the law of the Lord, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezer 7:10–11**

When you hear the word *teach*, it's easy to picture a classroom, a stage, or someone with a microphone. But in the Bible, teaching is less about standing in front of people and more about sitting beside them. We become teachers when we take a moment where something God has shown us becomes something that we share.

That means teaching doesn't require a seminary degree. Or a pulpit. Or a platform. It requires proximity. When you start walking with the Lord, you soon see that there's always younger believers who need to be taught.

When I was still in high school, I started teaching a Sunday School class of elementary school kids. Our family attended a small church and so my class had 4 or 5 kids each week. I would study the lesson, think of ways to illustrate it, and I would show up and teach it. That began a life of teaching, and I learned early on a simple principle—you don't really know something until you teach it. Sure, you can memorize some Scripture in your quiet time, and you can pick up principles, but there is nothing that has helped me master the Word of God like the pressure of explaining it to someone else.

All of us Christians should become teachers, in some way. What do I mean? It could be that you're a parent who explains a verse you learned that day to your child as you tuck them into bed. You can be a teacher to a friend, a person who encourages another who is struggling by texting them a passage of Scripture that God brought to mind for their situation. You don't have to be a Life Group Leader to remind other people what God has said.

Most of the most powerful teaching moments in my life have been quiet and relational, almost unnoticeable in the moment, but they have carried a lasting impact.

Many people hesitate here because they feel like they don't know enough of the Bible to teach it. But teaching isn't about having all the answers; it's about sharing what God is showing you. Just teach what you know, and live what you teach.

Ezra didn't just carry the Word in his mind. He carried it into other people's lives. And that's when the gracious hand of God rested on him. Because the Word of God was never meant to be a reservoir that collects and sits still. It's meant to be a river. If it stops with you, it stagnates. But when it flows through you, it brings life wherever it goes.

Most of you probably don't know the name, Philip Pinkston, but he has been teaching 4 year olds for 40 years at Bellevue Baptist Church. What an example this man is, to have the humility to step inside a classroom full of pre-kindergarten kids, and teach a bible verse or principle, year after year, for four decades. What Philip does is an incredible application of what it means to be a teacher. Just find a way to share what God is teaching you, to others that are coming behind or around you.

Ezra found favor with God, he was used mightily by God, because he studied, obeyed, and shared with others what he learned in Scripture.

Now let's take the rest of our time to tackle some of the questions that may pop into peoples' heads when hearing Ezra 7.

**A Seasoned Christian Asks:**

**How can I explain to a coworker that the Bible is reliable? She says it's so old it must have been copied incorrectly and contains errors.**

There are those who say that the Bible has been tampered with over the years—that we can't even be sure the words we read today are true to the original.

The person who asked this question would like to say to the lady, "No, the Bible we have today is the same one the first Christians read from. Just go back and read the original copy of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John and see for yourself."

Unfortunately, ancient things were written on parchment that could only survive for a set number of years. Over time, those materials naturally wore out and were lost. Now, before you feel alarmed that we don't have the originals, be aware that this is also true of other ancient writings like those of Plato and Aristotle. Having *no originals* is the norm for every ancient document.

What we do have is copies, and copies of copies. Not one perfect scroll, but thousands of fragments like these, scattered across the ancient world. Some of these parchments are small containing a chapter of Scripture or so. Some are larger, containing a whole book of the Bible. But here's the beauty: when you take all these pieces of the Bible, and compare them, they line up with remarkable consistency.

It's almost like God didn't preserve His Word in a single museum—but in thousands of hands. Today, scholars examine those thousands of copies to compare, verify, and reconstruct the original text with remarkable precision.

When historians evaluate whether any ancient document is reliable, they typically look at two key factors. First, how many manuscripts do we have? The more copies available, the easier it is to compare them and confirm what the original said. Second, how much time passed between the original writing and the earliest copies we possess? The smaller that gap, the more confidence we have that the text hasn't been significantly altered over time.

Now, when you apply those standards to the Bible, it stands on incredibly solid ground. Let me show you why the Bible holds up here, by comparing it to other writings we accept as trustworthy.

Take the New Testament alone. Today, we have over 5,800 Greek manuscripts, along with more than 20,000 additional copies in Latin and other languages.

That's an ocean of evidence. And many of these manuscripts date incredibly close to the time the originals were written—some within 50 to 100 years. That's a small gap.

Now compare that to other ancient works we all accept as historically legitimate. For example, the writings of Homer, like *The Iliad*, survive in about 1,800 manuscripts, with the earliest copies appearing hundreds of years after the original.

You see we have far fewer copies and the gap between original and oldest in our possession is much wider. But no teacher in a classroom today says, "Now kids, I have to tell you that we don't really know that Homer wrote these words. There's a good chance it's all been tampered with and can't be trusted."

How about one more? Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars*.

*This is one of the oldest histories we have, considered accurate reporting of the events of prior to 50 BC—we have fewer than 10 reliable manuscripts, and they're separated from the original by nearly a thousand years. Yet no one stands up in a classroom and says, "I'm not sure Caesar really wrote this."*

So here's the point: if we trust those documents based on the evidence we have, then the Bible stands on even stronger historical footing, by a wide margin.

And it's not just the quantity—it's the consistency. When scholars compare these thousands of biblical manuscripts, what they find is an astonishing level of agreement. There are variations, yes, but the vast majority are minor—spelling differences, word order, things that don't affect the meaning of the text. In fact, no core doctrine of the Christian faith hangs on a disputed passage.

So when someone says, "Hasn't the Bible been copied so many times that it must be full of errors?" you can respond with confidence: actually, the large number of copies is what protects its accuracy. Instead of weakening the Bible, it strengthens our ability to verify it.

One of the most fascinating confirmations of the Bible's reliability came in 1947 with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls near Qumran, by the northwest shore of the Dead Sea. A young Bedouin shepherd, while searching for a lost goat, tossed a stone into a cave and heard something shatter. Inside were ancient jars filled with scrolls of various books of the Old Testament—some of which dated back over 1,000 years earlier than any manuscripts we had previously possessed. These tall jars were like time capsules and created unique conditions for the scrolls to survive.

Because of the unique desert conditions: the dry climate prevented decay, the jars shielded them from light and moisture, and the remote caves kept them undisturbed. Among the discoveries was a complete copy of the book of Isaiah.

Now here's what stunned scholars: when they compared those manuscripts to the versions we have today, they found they were virtually identical despite a thousand years of time between them. The message had been preserved with remarkable accuracy. This showed that what we're reading today is not a corrupted version of Scripture, but a faithfully transmitted one.

### **A Good-hearted Skeptic Asks:**

**How can you say that Christians possess the "true" Word of God when Protestants and Catholics don't even have the same books in their Bible?**

That's a fair question, and to answer it well, we need to take a quick step back and understand how we got here. I mentioned the teaching of the Catholic church last week as we discussed where we go when we die, and the Catholic belief of purgatory.

I hope this isn't overkill but I found that most people haven't studied why there are today, *Catholics* and *Protestants*. I'm not saying this to drive a wedge between you and

your Catholic friends, but so that you can better understand them, and where they are coming from.

The word *catholic* simply means “universal,” referring to the worldwide church. For over a thousand years, after Jesus rose from the dead, there were no denominations like we think of today—no Baptists, Methodists, or Presbyterians. There was one broad, unified church.

Then, in the 1500s, a German monk named Martin Luther raised concerns about certain teachings and practices within the church. In 1517, he posted what became known as the *95 Theses*, calling for reform. His goal wasn’t to leave the church, but to bring it back in line with Scripture. However, his protest led to a split, and those who followed his movement became known as *Protestants*—those who protested. If you find this interesting, I’d recommend you google the Protestant Reformation and see what you can learn. It’s a fascinating period of history—a fork in the river that we feel today.

Now, it is true that your Catholic friends have a bible with more books in it. Those extra books are called the *Apocrypha*, a word that means hidden or concealed.

### **Apocrypha = hidden or concealed**

I know what you’re thinking—why wouldn’t we want all the information in our Bibles too? We want in on the secrets. Let’s talk about it.

The books that make up the apocrypha, were written in what many call the “intertestamental period,” about 400 years between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Between Malachi and Matthew, there is a blank page in your Bible. That single page represents 400 years without a single prophet showing up, one who brought a message to God’s people. This is often referred to as the period of silence.

The apocryphal writings popped up in that period of awkward silence between God and His people, but the Jewish people, the ones entrusted with preserving the Scriptures, did not recognize these books as authoritative. Jesus and His apostles consistently affirmed the books we have in our Old Testament, quoting extensively from those 39 books, but none of them ever quote the Apocryphal books, which is why Protestants have chosen to leave them out.

So why does the Catholic Bible include them?

Because this difference ultimately comes down to authority.

Protestants and Catholics disagree on who has the power to declare what is Scripture.

The Catholic Church believes that God gave to the pope and to the church councils, the authority to both preserve and define Scripture. In 1546, at a meeting called the Council of Trent, the Catholic church formally affirmed these books as part of the Bible.

Protestants, however, took a different approach. They believed that Scripture itself should be the highest authority—that no pope or cardinal could decide what is God’s Word and what isn’t. So Protestants have stuck to the books in the Hebrew Old Testament—the books that Jesus and Paul and others used to teach others the story of God and his dealing with man. It should also be noted that the Apocrypha contains a few passages that seem inconsistent with other major biblical themes. For example, the book of Romans says that we can approach the throne of Jesus with confidence—that we can come directly to Christ with our needs, but the Apocrypha introduces the idea of praying to the saints, and mentions the idea for praying for the dead whose souls are bound in purgatory.

So the difference isn’t just about a few extra books—it’s about the foundation:

When it comes to authority...

- Catholic view: The church (guided by its leaders and tradition) has authority to define Scripture.
- Protestant view: Scripture itself is the final authority, and the church submits to it.

But I want to be careful when creating an us vs them mentality with our Catholic friends and family members. I have members of my extended family would call themselves Catholic.

Both Catholic and Protestant Bibles contain the same core books—especially the entire New Testament—which clearly teaches the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel itself is in there, and has the power to save all of us, despite imperfections in our theology.

No matter what church a person attends, if they understand the Gospel—that Jesus came, died, and rose again for our sins, if they believe that salvation is a gift from God, and not something earned by works, then those people are saved.

The Apostle Paul told us in 1 Cor 15, what is the most important thing:

**For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. 1 Cor. 15:3-5**

So there you have it—let’s keep the main thing the main thing.

Over the years, I've seen some funny church signs. Churches sometimes write the most odd things on their signs, but one time I saw this one and loved what it said:

Just love everyone. I'll sort 'em out later. –God

That's the way I try to live.

Finally..

### **A Student Asks:**

**Which student has the most advantages in gaining the gracious hand of God over their life—one who is homeschooled, Christian-schooled, or public-schooled?**

This isn't a dangerous question at all. Two weeks ago, I talked about the holy chandelier, and now this!

One of the challenges of leading a church like Bellevue, one I honestly didn't see coming, is building real community among students who are living very different lives. We've got groups that almost run on separate tracks. If you're homeschooled, your daily rhythm looks very different than someone in private school. If you're in private school, your world feels different than someone in public school.

Every parent is looking for the best road for their kids—the one with the fewest potholes. But I must say, when it comes to raising kids, there's no such thing as a no-risk option. Every family has to prayerfully decide what's best, and sometimes even within the same family, different kids need different paths.

So instead of asking, "Which one is best?" it's more helpful to ask, "What are the strengths and challenges of each?"

For homeschool families, the parents have a greater ability to shape what their kids are exposed to in the formative years of their lives. Since we're all trying to help our kids develop godly convictions, this approach makes a lot of sense. I know homeschool kids that turned out great, and I know some that haven't. And I'm going to say that about private and public school kids as well. Each path comes with challenges.

The challenge that homeschool students have is learning the skill of relating to a wide range of people. Life is going to bring you into contact with all kinds of backgrounds and beliefs. Be thankful that you have been grounded in your conviction by parents who love the Lord, but as you grow, challenge yourself to build relationships with people who come from all religious backgrounds, as Jesus modeled himself.

For private or Christian school students, the advantage is that your education is being filtered through a biblical worldview. You're seeing how faith intersects with history, science, literature—all of it. That's powerful. But there's a subtle danger too: when you're around Christian things all the time, the familiarity can quietly drain appreciation. Like people who live in a tourist town and no longer enjoy the beauty that others travel far to see. If you go to a Christian school, be careful when you start to think that you must be a solid Christian because you attend a solid Christian school. We do not learn by osmosis, by simply being around a belief system—we have to drink it in ourselves and apply it on a regular basis. Faith has to be personally owned. It doesn't transfer by proximity.

For public school students, the advantage is that you're living in a setting that looks a lot like the world. You're probably surrounded by a wide range of beliefs—students who come from families in different religions, different lifestyles, different perspectives. That can sharpen you. It can stretch you. It can give you opportunities to live out your faith in a visible way. But the challenge is just as real: how do you swim toward the Lord when current of the river is pulling the other way? It takes courage. It takes work. And building solid conviction. You've got to be like Daniel—a young man who lived in a culture that didn't share his beliefs, and yet he stayed close to God.

If you asked me—what is the best indicator that a student will have the gracious hand of God upon them—I wouldn't point to their school. I would point to their interaction with Scripture, and how seriously they take it.

**Now Ezra had determined in his heart to study the law of the Lord, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezz 7:10–11**

There are some homeschool kids that do that, and some that don't. Some private school kids that do, and some that don't. Some public school kids that do, and some that don't.

No matter where you go to school, does this describe you?