

Chapter 6: Rebuild! Invest in the Temple! (Ezra 3:7-9)

Ezra 3:7 makes a description of what the Israelites did to initiate the building of the temple. They invested money and other resources. This is a key realization and step we must recognize as important for rebuilding the temple. If we skip this step, we are stunted in our rebuild and cannot go forward. The dictionary.com website defines “invest” in this manner: to put (money) to use, by purchase or expenditure, in something offering potential profitable returns, as interest, income, or appreciation in value. When the Israelites gave money and resources to the masons, carpenters, and people of Sidon and Tyre, they were making an investment in the building of the temple. In doing so, they were saying this is important to bring us appreciation value. Placing their money into the future of the temple placed their heart into God’s hands so He could multiply their return.

So many times when money is involved we turn and run. This is not of God. Why? Because of the reason we turn and run. We want to hold on and trust in our bank accounts instead of trusting God to provide. God desires to multiply our return when we invest in Him. Now doesn’t that sound like an odd statement when we consider God and money? Yes! But the reason it seems odd is because of the society in which we currently live. When we consider investing money, we think of financial gain. We may even ask ourselves - why would God desire to make me wealthy? However, God is looking way beyond the temporal gain of money to a heart that has become more like His Son’s. When we invest our resources in our temple and rebuilding ourselves to grow closer to Christ, God will multiply our return spiritually. Sometimes this involves blessings of money so we can continue blessing others, but every time it involves so much more.

The best personal example I can give you is my own investment story. Many times we look at our resources and respond, “I just don’t have the money for anything extra. How can I invest?” That is the state I was in when the Lord nudged my heart and my husband’s heart to begin homeschooling our children. I was working at a church as a part- to full-time office manager. Basically, I worked while my children were in school. That placed me in the office approximately thirty hours per week. The Lord began to show me and my husband there was a need for homeschooling through an educational concern of our oldest. It was at this time when we realized that God wanted me to invest time in our children and, since time is money in the world, that meant money as well. So I went to my employer and asked for an adjustment to my schedule and a pay cut. Yes, I ASKED for a pay cut. However, because of my sinful ways of being a workaholic, I didn’t cut back on my time spent working too much. I only went into the office three days a week, but actually worked from home as well. This was only partially what God was calling for me to do. He needed my resource of time as well. And so a few years later, He pricked our hearts again and my husband and I began praying about what needed to be done.

At this time we just had our third daughter. She was only 6 months old. It was stressful to consider cutting my income even more. Many factors surrounded the decision, including the fact that my employer needed my presence. However, we knew the Lord was calling for more of my time at home. We didn’t know the details as to how that would work out, but we knew the calling. So I went back to my employer and once again asked for another pay cut. This time I had to reduce my hours and with it was the reality of a substantial pay cut. Basically, within 2 years my income was cut almost in half. However, the Lord knew our needs and he blessed our obedience.

And let me stop my story there, because it is enough for you to understand the investment and the steps we took of obedience. Now, let me pick up where I am at the moment. God has multiplied the return of this investment. He has taken my little bit of time and money and made it into a huge spiritual growth for me and my family. In addition, as I write, we are adding onto our house. What! You mean you have less money coming in and still able to invest in adding onto your house. Yes! Because God knows no limits to His blessings. As we have been obedient to Him, He

has shown us more of Himself. And consider this, God is good. Seeing MORE of Him is seeing MORE of His goodness.

This personal testimony gives me an appreciation value not in my bank account, but in my growth in knowing more about God and His Son, Jesus Christ. How does one invest in the Spiritual rebuild of their own temple? To answer this question would be easy to say buy a Bible, purchase Bible studies, give more to your church. However, for me to direct in these ways would be overstepping. While all of those suggestions are good ones, they may not be the ones God has for you. The best and only way we can invest in the rebuild of our own spiritual temple is to present all our resources submissively before the Lord and ask Him to direct us as to how we should use them.

We aren't paying for a spiritual temple rebuild. We are investing in the kingdom of God. For when you "pay for" something you consume it and then move on to the next consumable purchase. However, when you invest in the Kingdom of God, you eagerly await the return by staying at the Father's feet for direction as to how you should use your resources. Invest, dear loved one, invest!

Don't forget to invest in people.

God desires that we invest in people. That is His main focus . . . His main love . . . the reason He sent His Son. It is the lost to which He wants us to invest our time. So let's not forget about people when we consider our investment.

Since I am a treasurer for two churches, I have learned a few things about people and their monies. One of the things I have learned is when someone has money to donate to the church, they want to know where it is most needed and how it is being used to minister. Ultimately, they want to invest their monies in a ministry that is investing in people. Many of them have the gift of giving and they are feeling the urgency from the Holy Spirit to give monetarily in advancing the cause for Christ by reaching people. This is such a blessed focus. One that I would encourage us all to have. But let me speak to those, like me, who may not have the monetary means of investing in people.

There is one thing we all have - time! One of the things I know many of us will say is that we don't have any spare time. I would like to encourage you that when you are focused on the things of God, there is always time to do them. It is the things in our way that take away from us having time for the things God is calling us to. We may have our time crammed with things, but we still have it. We may be mis-managing the time we have, but we still have it. Dear believers, we must look at our time as a way to invest in people. We need to build relationships with people; fellowship with people; encourage people in Christ; love on people. When I look at Jesus and His walk on earth, this is all that I see. In regards to money, the Bible does not tell whether or not Jesus specifically worked to earn money. We do know that He followed His adopted father, Joseph, in his trade as a carpenter. Therefore, at that time, He probably earned money. It is likely then that He worked at different times as a carpenter to earn money. Regardless, what we see in Christ's walk here on earth is an investment of time. Walking with His disciples; teaching His disciples; eating with His disciples . . . Fellowshiping and eating with tax collectors; taking time to see who touched His cloak; looking into the eyes of the adulterous woman; encouraging the ones He healed to sin no more. Jesus invested time and we, dear believers, are called to do the same.

Has your neighbor needed a hand? Are there ones who won't look you in the eye because they feel the burden of their sin? Do you see an eagerness from someone desiring to fellowship with you? Has God laid someone on your heart while you are reading these words? Then, the call to invest in them has been made. They need for you to reach out to them. They need for you to invest in them.

As we invest time in others, struggles will abound. Therefore, it is good for us to keep some things in mind and arm ourselves with the Word of God. This will help us in displaying grace and truth, as Jesus did, into the lives of others.

Keep yourself in God's Word so that you can continue to be in right thinking. As we spend time in God's Word, His Spirit will remind us of our human frailty and point us to Jesus. Our minds will be transformed by the truths we find there and our attitudes will be prepared for discernment. This will result in our time with people being an investment of guiding them towards God's Word as well.

God's Word will lead you in fleeing from sin. Putting on the mind of Christ gives us the ability to recognize sin. When we recognize it and realize we are done with sin (1 Peter 4:1), then we are armed to flee from it when we are fellowshiping with others. So many sins are tempting when we invest our time with others. The sins they are overcome with may become very tempting to us. And even when we aren't tempted to sin, we are tempted in other sins like gossip about the person. Therefore, we have to be active in God's Word so He can guide us in fleeing from sin. We must turn the opposite direction and run hard after righteousness. That is what we are seeking to invest into the lives of people, righteousness, not sinful acts.

Living for God begins with His Word. When we grow up in Christ and surrender our lives to Him, we will live for God by investing time with others. We will encourage them by the lives we live. The only way we know the life to live is by staying in God's Word. This is how we find out what truly pleases God and this is how God will equip us with everything good to do His will (Hebrews 13:22). Many times we see the world doing good for others, but is it the good that God has for them? Staying in God's Word will help you to not only live for Him, but invest discernment in the lives of others as they see their need for Him - even when they think they are doing good.

Finally, in regards to investing in people, let's not forget that God has given us a directive as to a particular group we should focus on - widows and orphans. James 1:27 tells us . . .

*“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:
to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”*

These two groups have a particular hardship when it comes to living in this world. The church has been called to them because they have no one in their family to help them. We need to make sure we invest in their physical welfare and particularly in their spiritual welfare. If you are looking for someone to invest your time and money in, then look no further. God's Word is calling off the page at us. He is telling us it is important we understand that widows and orphans need us. They need us to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world and to look after them. God desires this so much that He stated it was the pure and faultless religion that He accepts. And note, the need is not only for us to invest monetarily in their lives, but for us to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world. I believe God is saying here that widows and orphans need for us to live in righteousness. These groups need to see us live the godly life because their own lives are so distressed with the things of this world they need to see the light of Jesus shining through us.

Deepening the Walk

Returning to Jerusalem and re-establishing God's ways was just the beginning for the Israelites. They knew that an investment was needed if they were to build the temple.

Read Ezra 3:7-9. How did they compensate the hired masons and carpenters and purchase the cedar for the temple? What were these items to them?

We see that the people also invested their time. According to Ezra 3:8-9, how did they do this?

From this reading, we learn that the investments they made were monetarily and their time and skills. If you have ever worked on a project of this size with someone, then you know how it builds a relationship with the person. Many times when you are working together, personal stories are shared and a bond is made. God desires that we bond in this way.

Read 1 Peter 4:7-8. What does Peter urge us towards as the most important?

When we do this, how does it cover a multitude of sins?

Christ is coming soon! As we await for His return, we should be in continual spiritual growth. Growing in love for God and for others. It is important to pray regularly and to reach out to needy people. Our possessions, status and power will mean nothing in God's Kingdom, but we will spend eternity with other people. That is why God desires we invest time and talents where they will make an eternal difference - in people.

Read Romans 12:9-13. What do these verses address in regards to our relationship with others?

When it comes to people and their needs, how should we respond? How can we prepare ourselves to be ready?

In regards to this, God calls us to real and genuine love that goes far beyond being polite. A genuine love requires concentration and effort. It focuses on helping others become better people. This demands our time, money and personal involvement. Christian hospitality isn't social entertaining. Social entertaining focuses on a spotless home and abundant food; a relaxed and good-natured host. Hospitality, however, focuses on the need of the guest. Do they need a place to stay, nourishing food, a listening ear, or just acceptance? It can happen in a messy home with a peanut butter and honey sandwich. Even while host and guest are doing chores together. Don't hesitate to offer hospitality just because you are too tired, too busy, or not wealthy enough to entertain.

Invest time with prayers for others.

Many times we don't consider the fact that our prayers are valuable and can be invested in eternal value as well. We can learn to pray for others by following Paul's Biblical example.

Read Colossians 1:3-12. Use the outline below to examine this Scripture and shape your prayers for others.

Pray for others by . . .

Being thankful for their faith and changed lives (1:3).

Asking God to help them know His will, give them spiritual wisdom and understanding (1:9).

Asking God to help them live to honor and please Him, giving them more knowledge of Himself. (1:10).

Asking God to give them strength for endurance and patience (1:11).

Asking God to fill them with joy and thankfulness (1:11, 12)

Consider how many people in your life could be touched if you prayed in this way?

Reflect Upon God's Desire:

Read Psalm 146. God desires that we extend His love to others. Help from people is temporal and unstable; however, help from God is lasting and complete. How does this Psalm express the ways we can extend God's love to others.

Praise, Repent And Yield:

Lord, I **praise** You for . . .

I **repent** of . . .

I **yield** to You . . .