

R^{Return!} Repent! Rebuild!

Ladies for
Jesus
Bible Study 

Written by Kelly Dixon

Sin has defiled our lives. It has contaminated our thinking, our actions, our families, our nation, etc. As believers, we are saved by the blood of Christ, but sin has defiled the way we live. Our temple (our mind, body and soul) needs repair because we have not loved the Lord our God. This study takes a look at Ezra to see how God's chosen people were called by God to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. The process involved a look at their own lives and the way they were living. It involved returning, repenting, and rebuilding so that the people once more could gather together and worship God in truth. As we look at Ezra we will see how we can return, repent and rebuild our own temple so that we may bring glory to God by worshiping Him and His Son in truth.

*"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him,
for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."
1 Corinthians 3:16-17*

This book belongs to: _____

Return! Repent! Rebuild!

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How to use this book and study?

This book and study was created to be a tool for growing closer to God and His Word. It is to be used for that full purpose. Gather with a friend or group of fellow believers to study this book together. You will see sections that will spark you for group discussion (Deepening the Walk) along with sections that will lead you to personal reflections for you to take one on one before the Lord (PRAY). May the Lord bless you to desire more and more of His Word as you read and study.

This study, along with others, is available free online at www.ladiesforJesus.com. Please abide by copyright laws by referencing the source of Ladies for Jesus when copying. However, feel free to make multiple copies for your group.

Introduction

This book has been one the Lord laid on my heart for many years. About six years ago, I felt the Lord leading me to write a Bible study on the book of Ezra. I would read this book of the Bible and take many, many notes, but the timing for writing the Bible study just never seemed right. I would venture to other books of the Bible and study them more and more. Even a full two years of in-depth study of the whole Bible was part of these six years. During this time . . .

- . . . I grew spiritually at an exponential rate.
- . . . I had a car accident that changed my understanding of God's grace over my physical body.
- . . . I began for the first time to truly see my body as the temple of God - where His Spirit resides!
- . . . I began homeschooling my children and learned what God truly meant in Deuteronomy 6:7.
- . . . I began to see my marriage differently and view my husband as God intended me to see him.
- . . . I started seeing the generational curse on myself and my family.
- . . . I discovered what Jesus truly meant when He referred to Eternal Life in John 3:16.

Unbeknownst to me during this time, God was drawing me closer to Him in preparation for this book that you hold in your hands or are reading on your screen right now. God was working in my heart and I am ever so grateful.

Because of the work He is doing in my heart, I began to look around at the world I live in and see how far away we are from the Word of God. My heart began to ache for my fellow believers. So many conversations I would have with them that would show how they weren't taking God's Word to heart. Unfortunately, many of them were not even taking God's Word to their minds. They weren't reading it regularly and, if at all, only listening to it on Sunday mornings. Oh how my heart began to ache. The ache was making its way right down to my bones and the realization set in of how lost we, who call ourselves Christians, really are. On top of that, I began to realize how lost we really are in my own backyard! My fellow Americans were going down a track that was leading so far away from God! We were in exile and we needed to return to God.

Urrrrk . . . Wait, back that truck up . . . did you just say we needed to *return* to God! As a believer, isn't God always with us? Doesn't His Spirit indwell us? Yes, His Spirit does indwell us, but He won't force Himself into the driver's seat. We must allow Him to drive. We must step out of the way. America, we have not only forced God out of the driver seat of our lives, but we have placed Him in the back seat . . . wait no, we have placed Him in the trunk . . . no, that's not right either . . . we have locked the trunk and aren't allowing Him to be active in our lives at all . . . It has even gone further than that, we have forgotten He is there or created our own golden calf version of Him to reside in the driver's seat! Ouch! Those are harsh words. I even hate writing them. But they are a reality of where our country stands and with that reality comes the need of a reality check. It is time that we remember Whose we are and unlock the trunk; Bow ourselves before Him in humble repentance and invite God back into the driver's seat of our lives.

This whole realization led me to discern why God began to turn my heart towards the book of Ezra six years ago. He was preparing me to truly understand what it meant to return to Him and rebuild the temple. In the book of Ezra, the Israelites were rebuilding the actual temple in Jerusalem. This temple they rebuilt is the one that, though added to by King Herod, Jesus Himself walked through and taught in and guided individuals towards truly knowing Him. In regards to the rebuild of our temple, we have to realize that Jesus resides in all believers. Using the rebuilding as a metaphor we need to "rebuild" the temple so that He can walk through us, teach through us and guide us into all understandings and truths in regards to Eternal Life - knowing the One True God and His Son, Jesus Christ. (John 17:3).

That is why this book is in existence. God has drawn me to write it so whoever reads it can benefit from what He has laid on my heart in regards to returning to Him. So many ways we are exiled and many of those ways are deep within ourselves. There are things we can do that will step us toward the rebuild. Many times we may not even realize the barriers we have deep within ourselves that prevent us from returning to God. In this book, we will look at these steps to rebuild and barriers. So with an open heart ready for Spiritual surgery, I pray that you use this book and may I venture to say even for you to abuse this book. If you don't have it in printed format, I pray you find some way to make that happen. This book needs to be one that you actually take to heart, turn down the pages, highlight, markup, and make it your own! Use the places that are given for you to reflect and challenge your heart to really understanding God's truths. This book is going to drive you towards God's Word. It will make you stop . . . yes, Urrrrrk! will become second nature . . . and really think through what God's Word is telling you. Why do I know this? Because I know God is working here. He has been working here! And He will continue to work because HIS WORD will not go out void. It always produces fruit. (Isaiah 55:11).

Now, don't get me wrong . . . I am not talking about *my words* that are in this book, but I am talking about *God's Word*. This book will point you to examining the Scriptures more and more. You can agree or disagree with my words. That doesn't make a difference. But when it comes to examining your heart in regards to God's Word, then please, please, please pay attention! It is His Word that this book will point you towards and it is His Word that will produce fruit. Draw yourself there and let's get started examining our hearts. Yes, we are in exile . . . now how bad is it?

In Christ,
Kelly T. Dixon

About the Author



Kelly Dixon is an author and motivational speaker whose desire is to inspire you to draw closer to Jesus. She loves to share God's Word so that others not only learn it but experience it deeply. She teaches in a clear, precise, and concise way so that you understand what it means to "deepen your walk with Jesus." Having received and accepted the call to motivate other Christian women toward a deeper relationship with Christ, she began the Ladies for Jesus ministry; a ministry of many ladies who love the Lord and share in this desire. Kelly is married to Kermit Dixon. They have three beautiful daughters, whom they enjoy homeschooling and growing together in seeking first the Kingdom of God. (Matthew 6:33).



Ladies for Jesus ministry desires to inspire and equip all Christian women to deepen our walk with Christ; to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to Him; and to delight in our intimate relationship with Him.

This mission is fulfilled by providing Bible studies online and in groups. If you would like for us to do a time of studying the Bible with your group, email Kelly@ladiesforJesus.com or phone 850.933.2379.

Download Ladies for Jesus Bible studies for free at www.ladiesforJesus.com.

Chapter 1: Deeply Immersed in THIS Society

When King Nebuchadnezzar captured Judah and seized the temple and the holy lands, God's people were not only taken into captivity, but they were immersed in a culture that they were expected to reflect in their lives. Those who loved the Lord must have felt disheartened and discouraged. Their temple was destroyed and the blessed items within the temple were being used for pagan worship. They were being pressured to compromise their own beliefs. This compromise in beliefs was just the beginning in deteriorating their relationship with God. Little by little the enemy, Babylon, was taking away not only their physical place of worship, but pressing their own culture into their spiritual walk as well.

In a subtle war technique, Nebuchadnezzar took the cream of the crop for beginning his infiltration - the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families who had been brought to Babylon as captives. These were men who were strong, healthy and good-looking; well versed in every branch of learning; and gifted with knowledge and good judgment. Men who were suitable to serve in the royal palace. Of course, when you look over this characteristic list, you see that there must be some in this bunch who are devout followers of God or they wouldn't possess such characteristics as being wise and gifted in knowledge and good judgment. Therefore, we have Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego). These men, while they are part of the bunch, are known above the rest because they not only possessed these characteristics, but they possessed the faith to use them wisely.

King Nebuchadnezzar had one goal in mind with these men - immersion! He knew if he could immerse them into his culture, they would be brainwashed into being faithful to him and only him. This is a tactic of Satan and one that he uses regularly. Slowly boil the frog and the frog will not jump out of the pot because he doesn't even know he is being cooked. Satan desires to immerse us in a society that is faithful to him. Recall, he desires to be God. So if he can immerse us into a society that is faithful to him, then he has stepped closer and closer into being lord of our life. We shouldn't be fooled into thinking this couldn't happen to believers because in many ways it already has happened to us. Jesus may be our Lord and Saviour, but if our lives reflect the ways of the evil one, then we are living as if Jesus is insignificant and this makes Satan the one to whom we are faithful. (John 8:44; Acts 13:10)

Both the Babylonians and the Persians had a relaxed policy toward their captives in which they allowed them to own land and homes and to take ordinary jobs. This doesn't sound like a captivity that we in America are used to considering. When we think of captivity, we reflect back and consider the Africans that were sold into slavery (many by their fellow countrymen), taken captive and brought over to North America. The cruel masters of that time were horrible to the slaves they owned. Many times beating them; having their way with the females; and other cruel measures. This is what we reflect upon because this is what is closest in our time in regards to slavery. Even though there were masters in America that were kind to their slaves and treated them well, captivity was evident. The cruelty of the horrific masters stands out in our minds. If we consider Biblically the way the Egyptians treated the Israelites, we again get a picture of cruelty in regards to captivity. But when we read the book of Daniel and see the ways of King Nebuchadnezzar, there is a different look at captivity. While he was cruel in his own ways of capturing his subjects, he knew that the best way to really have them be faithful to him was to immerse them into his culture. King Nebuchadnezzar knew he had to make them want his culture more than they wanted what they already knew. And for the Israelites, what they knew was the true life of serving God. Immersion into any other life would be unfaithful to God and disobedient to Him.

This is what has happened to the Christians in America. We have been immersed into a culture that has taken us away from serving God. And this, like Babylonian immersion, has been a quick process. It has been 240 years since we signed the Declaration of Independence. In that short period of time, we have gone from being one nation under God to one nation bothered by God. We no longer want to hear what He has to say about the way we should run our

government. Clear Biblical principles are written and seen throughout our Declaration of Independence and other historical documents that shaped our nation. But clear techniques from Satan have caused us to be boiling slowly and not even realizing it. These techniques of the enemy have made Christians less effective for Christ and now we are so immersed in this society that we have to make great strides to return to God to even be able to see clearly the path to His throne. This is a call that God is sending profoundly to those who recognize the immorality of our society and desire to be pulled out of the slimy pit, mud and mire in which we have allowed Satan to entrap us. Oh dear beloved, if this is your heart, then let me tell you that God desires to pull us out of this slimy pit, mud and mire. His Word tells us in Psalm 40:2 that it is already done, but there is a condition for us to receive the benefits. WE have to reach for Him and allow Him to set our feet on the strong foundation of Jesus Christ and His Word. It is our foundation in Christ that gives us a firm place to stand.

Do you hear God calling? Return! . . . Repent! . . . Rebuild!

There is an interesting aspect we need to consider as we move forward in allowing God to work on our hearts to take a stand on the foundation of Christ. When the Israelites were finally released by King Cyrus of Persia to return to their homelands, many of the Israelites did not go. King Cyrus' proclamation of freedom went to all the original 12 tribes, but only Judah and Benjamin responded and returned to rebuild God's Temple. The 10 tribes of the northern kingdom had been so fractured and dispersed by Assyria and so much time had elapsed since their captivity, that many may have been unsure of their real heritage. Thus, they were unwilling to share in the vision of rebuilding the temple. *This is how Satan works. He wants to fracture and disperse Christians so they do not have the motivation to return to their real heritage. A heritage that is built in Christ alone. When we disconnect from our roots, we never grasp hold of the truth and, therefore, we don't have a stable foundation.*

STOP - absorb that - go back and read the italicized sentences again.

Do you see this in America?

The return that is being called for here is a return to the foundation of Christ! America was rooted in the foundation of Christ. This country was built upon the message of Christ and proclaiming that message across the world. This is what drove the spread of pioneers from east to west across North America - not gold as our changed history books would like us to believe. It was the drive to be missionaries for Christ that drove us further west.

Now I am not naive. I do know mixed in the midst of great men of God are instruments of Satan. And there were those who were driven by finding gold or we would not have had such a discovery of gold and the gold rush in the mid-1800s. However, consider the hearts of true foundation. Consider what motivated individuals to journey over the treacherous seas to a new land they had never seen but had only heard about. This motivation was through seeking freedom from a king and country who forced catholicism on them. Individuals who were seeking to worship God as they were led to worship Him and not as they were forced to worship Him. These individuals are the ones who died on the journey over and these are the individuals who God blessed to survive as well. *They had motivation of finding the One true God's heart and this way to the new land (America) was how they were led to do it.* Do you have this same motivation?

It seems that the Christians in our world today don't realize how they are slowly diminishing in the principles we were founded upon. In doing so, we are diminishing in being effective for Christ. Our creature comforts have caused this effect. We, like the Israelites who didn't return, like where we are and don't want to be disrupted from our lifestyles. However, more prominently, it is the fact that we haven't been in God's Word and holding true to His Word that is our main downfall. As a teacher of the Word, I have had to study the Word. When doing so, conviction of my own life has been brought to light. My own prayer life has changed; my own ways are changing; my own desires have been adjusted. And even in the midst of all these changes, I see how far away I am from staying true to the Word of God. Mainly because I grew up in a culture that has been shifting away from the Word all my life!

Now don't jump to the conclusion that I am blaming my parents, grandparents or ancestors. The blame is sinful nature for all mankind and the spiritual warfare therein. In my lifetime, and the lifetime of my parents alone, a lot has happened that has taken us away from the truth. However, I am blessed. My parents were a part of the remnant that taught me to look at the Word of God for direction. I am sure they also struggled with how to stay true to the Word of God in their own lives. Even so, I am convinced that their teaching me the Word is what gave me the foundation to see what is blaring in my face today. And what is blaring is how much believers have not stayed true to the Word! If it wasn't for them teaching me the Word and taking me places (like a Bible teaching church) to learn more about the Word, then I know I wouldn't see this great divide between the truth of the Word and the lives of Christ Followers (Christians).

I am not throwing the baby out with the bathwater here. I am not saying because we are so divided from the truth of God's Word that we are separated from Him and doom to hell. For that concept in itself is against true salvation and the security that the Word of God reveals. What I am saying is we are not being effective for Christ. We aren't seasoning the world anymore and we are losing our saltiness. So now what should we do?

In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus tells us:

*“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?
It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.
You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a
lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.
In the same way, let your light shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Once I realized we are losing our saltiness, I saw these Words spoken by Jesus in a new light. My interpretation of these verses in the past has always been one that saw Jesus telling us two different ways we can show Christ to this world and bring glory to the Father. While that interpretation of this Scripture still holds true, there is further application to be considered. Jesus said if salt loses its saltiness then it is “no longer good for anything *except* to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.” Because as followers of Christ we have lost our saltiness the world sees no more use for us. So what is their response? They aggressively throw our morals into our faces, mock us and trample on our values. Let's face it, we have lost our saltiness!

If we look further in Jesus' Words, we will see that Jesus doesn't scold or join in on the condemnation trampling of the ones who have lost their saltiness. No, Jesus continues in the truth of what we need to do and that is shine our light for Him. Once we have lost our saltiness (and we have) then we need to work on how brightly we are shining our light. Are we hiding it under a bowl or are we putting it on a stand? And what does this all mean? We Christians, who have lost our seasoning effect, can still shine by allowing Jesus to change our hearts through His Word and staying true to His Word. Heed the words James proclaimed:

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in the mirror and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does.” James 1:22-25.

I don't know about you, but the trampling effects that are happening to my Christian morals and values do not feel like a blessing. But reality check - they aren't a blessing! Why? Because we are not living as blessed people. We are living as cursed individuals. Look back at what James is saying here. If we don't just **listen to God's Word** but **really look at it intently and continually** do this - then go and **do** what it says - **then** we will be blessed. There is no way we

can be blessed if we aren't holding true to God's Word. And because we haven't held true to God's Word, we are being trampled upon. It is up to us! We have to be the ones who change the way we will respond. Jesus told us how - let our light shine. James told us how - stay true to the Word. This is why we need to return to God. We have lost our saltiness and now we *must* shine our light. How do we return? That is a process that we will be evaluating. In study of the Babylonian exile, there has been a lot the Lord has revealed in regards to how we can return and shine our light. It is at this place in history we will begin our return.

Deepening the Walk

If a seasoning has no flavor, it has no value. If Christians make no effort to affect the world around them, they are of little value in spreading the gospel of Christ. When we are too much like the world, we no longer spread the seasoning of Christ. Believers should not blend in with everyone else.

Read Matthew 5:13-16. How have believers lost their saltiness for Christ?

In what ways can we let our light shine for Christ?

According to Jesus, what is the reason why we should let our light shine? (v. 16)

Studying God's Word is only the beginning of obedience. It is important that we listen to what God's Word says, but it is much more important that we do what it says. We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study time by the effect it has on our behavior and attitudes.

Read James 1:22-25. What does James say we are doing if we only listen to God's Word and we don't do what it says? (v. 22)

What happens when we don't address what we see in the mirror of God's Word? (v. 24)

How have Christians today been ignoring the Word of God in their lives? How have they been misusing the Word of God in their lives?

Reflecting on yourself, do you put into action what you have studied?

Refusing to listen is a symptom of stubbornness stemmed from our pride. Jesus addressed the religious leaders about this. **Read John 8:42-47.**

What does Jesus point to as the reason they couldn't understand the truths He told?

If we refuse to believe the truths of God's Word, what does this tell us about our ourselves?

Reflect Upon God's Desire:

Read Psalm 40:1-3. What are the four benefits David received from the Lord?

What does this tell us about the Lord's desires toward us?

God desires that we not be stuck in our pride. He desires that we not be associated with Satan, the Father of Lies. God desires that we see truth and allow Him to show it to us, bring us out of the pit that we are in; and set us firmly upon His foundation so we can live in truth with Him.

Praise, Repent And Yield:

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

I **repent** of . . .

I **yield** to You . . .