

THE MINISTRY OF EZRA:  
A BIBLICAL MODEL OF INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP

By

Matthew R. Nix

Liberty University

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## **Abstract**

Despite many studies on intergenerational worship, there is little focus on a specific biblical character with the aim to edify the Church family as a whole in terms of intergenerational worship and how it impacts all generations and family types in the Church today. This study focuses on the ministry of Ezra and how he led others through a time of intergenerational worship and transition. Guided by examples from Ezra's ministry, along with historical research, this study will seek to discover ways that Ezra taught worship across generational lines, lessons that the 21<sup>st</sup>-century church can glean from his ministry, and the critical impact that his example of intergenerational worship can have on single families in the Church. Through these findings, one will see how Ezra taught worship across generational lines during a time of transition by studying, teaching, and enacting the Word of God. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century church will see the benefits that come from this model through a weekly worship service in terms of intergenerational participation, self-sacrifice, and mentorship. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century single family will also see the benefit that comes from this type of weekly intergenerational worship service in terms of inclusion in the church family, support from the congregation, and opportunities to serve all generations. Further, this study will help encourage other church ministry disciplines to research more materials that can demonstrate a biblical method that any church pastor or lay leader can follow in order to incorporate intergenerational aspects in all family groups that are represented, especially in the area of single-parent homes.

## Introduction

Celebrating the past and moving toward the future in regard to worship is what intergenerational worship is all about. The Old Testament provides an example of a man who demonstrated a wonderful model of intergenerational worship, and that man was Ezra. Ezra's ministry took place in Jerusalem around the year 458 B.C. after the exiles returned to Israel. Ezra, "was a descendant of Aaron through Phinehas, but he was also a skilled scribe in the law (v6). He came prepared to study the law, teach it, and enact it (vv.12-26)."<sup>1</sup> Ezra studied what God preferred in worship, taught out of self-sacrifice, and enacted the Word through mentoring others despite generational lines. This study focuses on the ministry model of Ezra and how he led others through a time of intergenerational worship and transition. Guided by examples from Ezra's ministry along with biblical and historical research, this study will seek to discover ways that Ezra taught worship across generational lines, lessons that the 21st-century church can glean from his ministry, and the important impact that his example of intergenerational worship can have on single-parent families in the Church today. The single parent tends to be left out in much of church programming today and is another reason why intergenerational worship is needed. Believers need to be roused to the fact that,

until recently the Christian church has failed to reach out to single parents. I believe the neglect of this needy group of people has come about for all the wrong reasons. For one thing, churches have been too proud to admit that they haven't been able to stem societies trend of divorce and poor morality. Single parents are hard clear evidence of the church's failure to make the family strong and to provide reasons and accountability for moral behavior.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Recalling The Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from The Garden to The New Creation*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 351.

<sup>2</sup> Got Questions Ministries. "What Does the Bible Say About Single-Parents / Parenting?," Got Questions, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.gotquestions.org/single-parenting.html>.

By dividing into age-segregated worship services single-parent families have most assuredly been negatively impacted by not having both parental figures present during times of worship. This is something that the body of Christ can help with by providing the godly role models that might be lacking in a single-parent home through times of intergenerational worship. Statistics show that, “Nearly three out of ten families with children today are headed by a single parent. That makes this group one of the largest population segments in the nation.”<sup>3</sup> Due to this fact it is vital for the Church to address this problem before it escalates further. With this in mind, a biblical example of intergenerational worship is needed to provide the solution to not only age-segregated worship, but also to address the need to edify and support single-parent families as they seek to encourage biblical standards within the home. Hopefully, times of worship across generational lines will help single-parent families find support, mentoring, and service opportunities. “Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV) tells us, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.’ This is a clear endorsement and mandate for the parents to shepherd the children. A healthy family is at the core of this verse. That the family should be on mission for God is inherent in many passages that communicate specifically the heart of God...”<sup>4</sup> The problem is how the Church should go about developing a model that can be utilized in the shepherding of single-parent families. There is no easy solution for this problem, but through biblical studies like this, one can

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<sup>3</sup> Thom S. Rainer. “Five Fascinating Facts About Single-Parent Families for Church Leaders.” May 26, 2014. <https://thomrainer.com/2014/05/five-fascinating-facts-single-parent-families-church-leaders/>.

<sup>4</sup> Jerry Pipes and Victor Lee, *Family to Family: Leaving a Lasting Legacy* (United States of America: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2011), 10.

begin to see ways that the Holy Spirit can work to bring about such times of fellowship regardless of age or number of parents.

This idea of an intergenerational model is often thought of when one reads the story of the foundation of the second temple recorded in Ezra 3:12-13 which occurs during the height of Ezra's ministry. It states that, "many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise..."<sup>5</sup> Some were very upset about the past being gone, while others looked with joy at the future that was before them. They were no different than many people today who, "from pew to pulpit, have heads full of misguided notions on the kind of worship that pleases God."<sup>6</sup> The Church as a whole needs to have experiences of grief for what has been lost from past generations, but also rejoice in the new work that God is doing. Finding ways to allow people the opportunity to celebrate what methods worked in the past in a way that seems relevant to the current generation is a wise approach to this line of thinking. In other words, worship leaders striving to lead intergenerational worship should learn from the ministry of Ezra and teach people to be guided by the presence of God instead of the preferences of man, as well as find forms of liturgy that fit within a modern context, and help to mentor the next generation of worshipers.

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New International Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Vernon M. Whaley, *Called to Worship: The Biblical Foundations of Our Response to God's Call*. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 149.

Intergenerational worship is about teaching people to lead by the presence of God instead of the preferences of man. By collaborating together it will go against basic human nature and make one confront diversity.<sup>7</sup> When dealing with intergenerational worship, one must be prepared to confront the diversity that God has placed in their congregation. This means one should consider, but not cater to, a particular style or method of worship. It is vital for worship pastors to steer debates about worship away from style and instead focus on lifestyle worship. This lifestyle of worship is realized in manner of living, more so than programming.<sup>8</sup> Once the congregation begins to view worship as more than style, it will be amazing to see how they begin to embrace all styles. This embrace will reflect what worship will be like in heaven, “For worship in heaven will be an exhilarating mix of musical styles—from Gregorian chant to hip-hop. So, learn to deal with it now!”<sup>9</sup> The point of all of this is simply to say that our congregations must turn away from their wants and focus on what Christ wants. Galatians 2:20 states, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” This is the not I, but Christ mentality that drives intergenerational worship.

Intergenerational worship is also about finding forms of liturgy that fit within a modern context while being self-sacrificial. Ezra demonstrated this when he taught about

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<sup>7</sup> Tim Sharp, *Collaboration in the Ensemble Arts Working and Playing Well With Others*. (Chicago, IL: Gia Publications, 2014), Xviii.

<sup>8</sup> Ed Stetzer, and Thom S. Rainer. *Transformational Church: Creating a New Scorecard for Congregations*. (Nashville, TN: B & H Pub., 2010), 150.

<sup>9</sup> Rory Noland, *The Worshiping Artist: Equipping You and Your Ministry Team to Lead Others in Worship*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 50.

godly worship and how it should take place in the context of the exiles return during a time of cultural transition. Change can be very hard for believers and therefore worship pastors must be patient and gradual with whatever change needs to take place within their congregations in the realm of worship. Any new worship element should be introduced with intention and in increments. Using godly wisdom, one should introduce one new song or form of worship at a time in order to not overwhelm and distract worshipers.<sup>10</sup> These little changes will gradually add up and help support intergenerational worship by not neglecting those who need time to adjust. By allowing the Holy Spirit to guide the timing of presenting the old in a new way, one truly begins to capture the heart of intergenerational worship. Allowing the Holy Spirit to guide the timing of presenting the old in a new way can captivate the heart of intergenerational worship, in that, “A worship that will have staying power is a worship that is firmly grounded in the old, yet aware of and concerned for new ways to respond to the old, old story.”<sup>11</sup> As this is done worship leaders will begin to bridge the gap, with the help of the Holy Spirit, which exists between traditional and contemporary methods of worship. This narrowing of the gap will bring forth positive influence from the wisdom of old and place it into the energy of the new, which will lead to a lifestyle of continuing worship reform. Through this wisdom the entire church should begin to, “rediscover a true theology of ministry. As that is undertaken, Contemporary Christian Music will not disappear from the ministerial

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<sup>10</sup> Ross Parsley, *Messy Church: A Multigenerational Mission for God's Family* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 199.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Webber, *Worship, Old and New*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1982), 264.



map. In fact, rediscovery could well assist in its continuing reform.”<sup>12</sup> This line of thinking also applies to the realm of technology in worship which, “can be a blessing to your worship ministry. Used with wisdom, it can enhance your worship services. Always use technology to bring the church together; never use it to isolate your people.”<sup>13</sup> So no matter what method of worship one is presenting to God, it should always be used in a way that unites the body of Christ instead of dividing it. This is clearly described in Romans 12:5, “so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

Next, intergenerational worship is about mentoring the next generation of worshipers just like Ezra did when teaching the law to the returning exiles. The elders in the Church must begin to pass on what God has taught them to the next generation. A godly mentor is one who teaches students, “not only the helpful things they said, but also their struggle, what they cared to talk about, how they tackled a problem, how they recovered from challenges and possible failures, what they devoted themselves to, and how they acted upon their convictions.”<sup>14</sup> It is also important to help future generations of worship leaders understand the true meaning of excellence in worship and how to avoid making music an idol because “musical excellence, understood correctly, is a worthy pursuit. But like all idols, it makes a terrible god.”<sup>15</sup> One’s love of God should never be

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<sup>12</sup> Harold M. Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith*. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 182.

<sup>13</sup> Kevin J. Navarro, *The Complete Worship Leader*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 184.

<sup>14</sup> Tim Sharp, *Mentoring in the Ensemble Arts Helping Others Find Their Voice*. (Chicago, IL: Gia Publications, 2013), 130.

<sup>15</sup> Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 197.

overshadowed by one's love of music. By reaching out and mentoring the next generation of worshipers, as Ezra did, those mentoring will begin to embrace some of the methods that can be effective as the culture changes and new methods are employed. In the realm of ministering to post-Christian generations it will require mentoring them in methods of worship both old and new.<sup>16</sup> This demonstrates that one should not throw out everything old, but learn from the methods of the old and infusing them with the methods of the new. Scripture clearly shows this principle in Ecclesiastes 1:9, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

Worship pastors should strive to lead their worship ministries to become more intentionally intergenerational with the help of the Holy Spirit. They should embrace all of the godly forms of worship that go on within the Church regardless of what generation it comes from. Dr. Whaley explained this fact very clearly when he attended a worship conference where, "They simply knew what they liked, and liked what they knew, and that's all they taught, with little regard for the opinions of the broader evangelical community—or God Himself."<sup>17</sup> This is a scary place to be as a worshiper and shows no sense of collaboration between generations. This way of thinking is most likely the single greatest challenge to the success of experiencing intergenerational worship in the Church. Instead, collaboration between all generations in the realm of worship should be centered on glorifying God. When collaboration begins all individuals can be strong in their own positions and gifts but should come together and be unified in their sense of mission

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<sup>16</sup> Dan, Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating New Worship Gatherings for Emerging Generations*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

which is the glorification of Christ.<sup>18</sup> God seeks worshipers who worship Him in spirit and in truth and not based on generational or personal preferences. John 4:23-24 states, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the spirit and in truth.” The bottom line is and always will be that times change, methods change, but God remains the same. Hence this study examines how the ministry of Ezra may help churches that do not currently have intergenerational worship services change their methods to include the implementation of intergenerational worship that can benefit not only single parents, but all who desire to worship God across generational lines.

### **Background of the Problem**

As a result of clashes over mainly musical style preferences, congregations around the world began to split themselves up according to generations. Regarding the splitting according to preferred styles, Parsley states:

The Jesus Movement generation of the 1970’s hungered for authenticity and a genuine demonstration of God’s power. Since the mainline church rejected them, they created their own church culture, unencumbered by tradition, which morphed into the mega church movement of the ‘80s and ‘90s. The worship wars of this era became the primary battleground of this generational conflict. Nowhere in the church did we see the battle lines drawn in a clearer way than in our liturgy and music. Many a congregation split over whether or not to use drums in the church, and countless coffeehouses were established in an attempt to deal with the problem of the American church’s increasing irrelevance. Incredibly, we might be repeating history.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Tim Sharp, *Collaboration in the Ensemble Arts Working and Playing Well With Others*. (Chicago, IL: Gia Publications, 2014), Xviii.

<sup>19</sup> Parsley, 88.

The negative impact of this methodology was that generations began to worship separately and were deprived of the wisdom that comes from worshipping together. This is a problem that is warned about in Hebrews 10:24-25 which states, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Scripture is clear that Christians should meet together regularly and says nothing about dividing the Church into preference-driven worship services.

Along these lines, single-parent families most likely have borne the brunt of these age-segregated worship services. Many of these young men and women may have never had a godly father or mother figure in their lives when they only attended children’s worship services that never interact with older generations. Nothing is inherently wrong with having times of children’s worship, but if they never interact with godly adult role models this could ultimately be detrimental to the future of the Church. In order to remedy this problem, “Church leaders must develop a strategy for intentionally discipling congregations in their journey to understanding the value of a unified worship voice.”<sup>20</sup> Granted, this will be a slow transition that many try to fix too fast, but it will hopefully take place thanks to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in worship pastors today.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite many studies on intergenerational worship, there is little focus on a specific biblical character with the aim to edify the Church family as a whole in terms of intergenerational worship, and how it impacts all generations and family types in the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.,53.

Church today. Particularly the topic of single-parent families seems to have little research available in the realm of a study that can articulate how a biblical character's role can help single parents in their role as godly parents, and how the Church can come alongside of them in that ministry. Specifics from research need to be gathered to show the unique way a biblical model can accomplish this.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Guided by examples from Ezra's ministry along with biblical qualitative historical research this study will seek to create a model of intergenerational worship that can be used by the Church body as a whole no matter the size, denomination, or location. This model will demonstrate ways that Ezra taught worship across generational lines, lessons that the 21<sup>st</sup>-century church can glean from his ministry, and the important impact that his example of intergenerational worship can have on single families in the Church. Through these findings, one will see how Ezra taught worship across generational lines during a time of transition by studying, teaching, and enacting the Word of God. The added emphasis on the impact that this model has on single-parent homes will also be a springboard for other areas of study to use in their research on single parents in the Church. The goal of this being to shed light on how worship ministries can minister to all families within the congregation. This study intends to provide methods that can be replicated by using the methods and definitions in this text to draw more biblical principles from other individuals mentioned in the Bible and apply those lessons to all family types within the Church. The intent of this study is to help to edify all generations for years to come through the help of the Holy Spirit. It is possible that pastors may be able to use this study in their plans to integrate their worship services toward an

intergenerational model based on the ministry of Ezra. Overall, the purpose of the study is to edify the Church in the role that intergenerational worship played not only in the time of Ezra, but also today.

### **Research Questions**

In order to identify a working solution to remedy the age-segregated worship model, the researcher addressed following two research questions:

RQ1: In what ways did Ezra teach worship across generational lines?

RQ2: In what ways can the intergenerational worship model of Ezra impact single-parent families in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Church?

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Ezra taught worship across generational lines by studying what God preferred in worship, by teaching out of self-sacrifice, and enacting the Word through mentoring others despite generational lines.

H2: Single-parent families in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Church are impacted by the intergenerational worship model of Ezra specifically in terms of how the model encourages the Church to embrace single-parent families through inclusion, congregational support, opportunities to serve all generations, and spiritual growth.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant to pastors, worship leaders, and parents alike. For pastors it provides a focused study on Ezra and how those lessons can be used to help foster intergenerational worship alongside of helpful methods for reaching out to single-parent families within their churches without dividing them into generationally specific services. For worship leaders it combines a dynamic of musical theory through the circle of fifths

with theological implications of Ezra's ministry that can be used to model a balanced worship ministry that can have a godly impact on all generations at the same time. For parents, it provides a guide for ways that two-parent families can come alongside of single-parent families and minister together for the glory of God by providing godly counsel in areas that might be left unfulfilled like the role of a godly father or mother in a child's life. There have been very few studies devoted to studying one specific biblical character and how this individual's ministry impacted intergenerational worship. Furthermore, this will address the gap that is also present in much worship literature regarding how to incorporate single-parent families in intergenerational worship services. This study will also seek to encourage other church ministry disciplines to research more materials that can demonstrate a biblical method that any church pastor or lay leader can follow in order to incorporate intergenerational aspects in all family groups that are represented, especially in the area of single-parent homes. In terms of institutional interest, scholars may be able to use this study as a springboard for continued edification of biblical models that can be found throughout the lives of historical characters.

Through this research many pedagogical implications will take place by affirming biblical ideas that can be used not only in times of Bible study, but also within the classroom setting. This may encourage worship pastors to self-evaluate how they are incorporating single-parent homes into times of intergenerational worship. Further, this study seeks to demonstrate a biblical model for intergenerational worship, based off of the ministry of Ezra, that can be used across denominational lines and in any church size. Through this one should begin to see the importance of weekly intergenerational worship gatherings and how they can impact all of the generations individually and as a unit.

## Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to help the reader understand the context of each term in this study:

*Worship*: In Scripture, the Hebrew word for worship is *shachah*, meaning to kneel, stoop, prostrate oneself, or throw oneself down, in reverence. “Closely related are the Hebrew words *shabach*, ‘to shout to the Lord’; *yadah*, ‘to worship with uplifted hands’; *halal*, ‘to celebrate God foolishly and boast about His attributes (love, mercy, goodness, etc.)’; and *tehillah*, ‘to sing spontaneous songs of praise.’ The Greek word for worship, *proskuneo*, means to express deep respect or adoration – by kissing, with words, or by bowing down. Associated words include *epaineo*, to commend or applaud; *aineo*, to praise God; and *sebomai*, to revere.”<sup>21</sup>

*Intergenerational*: “Different ages actively participate together (usually termed intergenerational, or IG) compared to activities in which the participants are more homogeneous in age.”<sup>22</sup>

*Single-Parent Family*: “Families with children under age 18 headed by a parent who is widowed or divorced and not remarried, or by a parent who has never married.”<sup>23</sup>

*Mentor*: “Coming to the aid of a person who is in a crisis or has a need that can only be met by someone older and wiser...”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Whaley, xiv.

<sup>22</sup> Harkness, Allan G. "Intergenerational Corporate Worship as a Significant Educational Activity." *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring, 2003): 5-21, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/205470240?accountid=12085>.

<sup>23</sup> Tish Davidson, “Single-Parent Families,” *Children's Health*, accessed December 12, 2019, <http://www.healthofchildren.com/S/Single-Parent-Families.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Parsley, 203.



*Psalms*: “A stand-alone musical composition, accompanied by instruments after the name in the heading: strings for Psalm four; flutes for Psalm five...”<sup>25</sup>

*Hymns*: “Scripture-based songs.”<sup>26</sup> or “a song of praise to God, but historically, hymns were defined as songs with doctrine, that were valuable and essential to the Christian church.”<sup>27</sup>

*Spiritual songs*: “noncarnal odes composed of personal testimony to express what God has done in the lives of those who sing them.”<sup>28</sup>

*Traditional music*: “Choral style hymns and revivalist songs accompanied by organ and piano.”<sup>29</sup>

*Contemporary music*: “consists of songs characterized by simple, popular styles of text, music and instrumentation. These praise and worship choruses are accompanied by guitars, keyboard, and drums...”<sup>30</sup>

*Ezra*: “a priest and scribe who was skilled in a law of Moses, is best remembered for his reading of the Torah to the postexilic community and the consequent religious revival it inspired.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Whaley, 153.

<sup>26</sup> Elmer L. Towns and Vernon M. Whaley, *Worship through the Ages: How the Great Awakenings Shape Evangelical Worship* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2012), 58.

<sup>27</sup> Whaley, 301.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>29</sup> *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity and Experience* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), 185.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 267.

*Nehemiah*: “well known for the administrative skills he demonstrated in organizing the restoration community to repair and rebuild a large section of the wall Jerusalem destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C..”<sup>32</sup>

*Zerubbabel’s Temple*: “although the whole Israelite community takes more responsibility in building this temple than they did in building Solomon’s, Zerubbabel is named first among those given leadership. This is appropriate, since in... 1 Chronicles 17:11–12 God gives special importance to the role of David’s offspring and constructing the temple and Zerubbabel was a prominent descendent of David 1 Chron.3:17–9.”<sup>33</sup>

*Levites*:

The priests were called to lead the nation in worship and service (Numbers 1:50; 3:6-7.) In doing so they were to be mediators of spiritual life in peace with God (Malachi 2:5.) Those who were faithful priests were given this life and peace, so that worshipers can see the faith lived out in them. The primary task (as messengers of the Lord) was to teach people the Word of the Lord (vv.6-7), turning them to righteousness and leading them in proper worship (not as in (1:6–17)).<sup>34</sup>

### **Assumptions**

There is an assumption that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and that the principles taught therein are true. Therefore, the study was conducted with the assumption that the Church desires to reach all generations with the gospel and will be open to biblical methods and models in order to do so. Further, there is an assumption

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas J E. Nykolaishen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 37.

<sup>34</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 210.

that the reader is familiar with the basic timeframe of the second temple period in which Ezra's ministry takes place.

### **Limitations**

The study is conducted to examine the biblical model of Ezra's ministry as an intergenerational model for congregations that are currently not intergenerational. Therefore, the findings may be applicable to non-intergenerational models, and thereby may be a limitation due to context.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

Reviewing the literature is vital for one to begin to grasp the overarching aspects of Ezra's ministry and how it impacts intergenerational worship to this day, and how it can also impact today's single-parent families. Among these sources are scriptures and commentaries focused on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as books, dissertations, and academic articles. The research is divided into four clear sections that look at Ezra's background, Ezra studying the Word, Ezra teaching the Word, and Ezra enacting the Word. Before this study begins it is vital for one to read key scriptures to fully understand the ministry of Ezra. The first scripture is Ezra Chapter 3 which states,

When the seventh month came, and the Israelites were in the towns, the people gathered together in Jerusalem. Then Jeshua son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his kin set out to build the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as prescribed in the law of Moses the man of God. They set up the altar on its foundation, because they were in dread of the neighboring peoples, and they offered burnt offerings upon it to the LORD, morning and evening. And they kept the festival of booths, as prescribed, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the ordinance, as required for each day, and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the sacred festivals of the LORD, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the LORD. From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from King Cyrus of Persia.

In the second year after their arrival at the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their people, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites, from

twenty years old and upward, to have the oversight of the work on the house of the LORD. And Jeshua with his sons and his kin, and Kadmiel and his sons, Binnui and Hodaviah along with the sons of Henadad, the Levites, their sons and kin, together took charge of the workers in the house of God.

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the LORD with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD,

For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.

And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away.

This key scripture will be the foundation of all of the lessons that will be gleaned in future chapters to answer the two hypothesis in this thesis.

### **Ezra's background**

An investigation into the background of Ezra himself will provide a clear view of this servant of God. It is also important to understand how the books of Ezra and Nehemiah work in tandem to create one fluid thought about the worship that was taking place during the ministry of Ezra. It is imperative to understand that, "Ezra-Nehemiah is not two books but one. There is no known Hebrew manuscript that separates the book into two parts before AD 1448."<sup>35</sup> The story of Ezra's ministry is told in these two

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<sup>35</sup> Douglas J E. Nykolaishen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 3.

biblical texts and is about the man, “who led a small group of Jews back to Jerusalem in 458 B.C.”<sup>36</sup> The name Ezra, “literally means help and is probably a shortened form of the name Azariah, translated ‘Yahweh helps’.”<sup>37</sup> What a powerful translation of the name of Ezra! This biblical character has nothing written about him in secular texts which presents a very narrow, but biblical view on the person of Ezra. The majority of information on the person of Ezra can be found only in Chapter 7-10 of the book that bears his name, as well as in Nehemiah 8 which states,

all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for that purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen,’ lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, ‘This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.’ For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, ‘Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.’ So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, ‘Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.’ And all the

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<sup>36</sup> Fried, Lisbeth S.. 2014. *Ezra and the Law in History and Tradition*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press. Accessed September 19, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central, 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*,1.

people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

Ezra, “also makes a cameo appearance in Nehemiah 12:36 at the dedication of Jerusalem’s city wall, but this is all there is. There are no contemporary nonbiblical references to him.”<sup>38</sup> However, even with the lack of secular writings on Ezra, due to the nature of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the records found within them are accepted by most scholars. The book of Ezra, “is a history, and a very simple history. No book of Scripture has fewer difficulties or fewer obscurities. There is no miracle recorded in it, and hence its historical truth is admitted almost universally.”<sup>39</sup> Due to this fact, it creates a very acceptable model for developing times of intergenerational worship that can be used in any church today.

With basic information on Ezra being reviewed, one can begin to look at the mission God called Ezra to fulfill, beginning with an examination of why Ezra returned to Jerusalem. Ezra who was a “scribe is introduced by a third person narrator, thus providing a tone of objectivity, and by King Artaxerxes, thus providing Ezra’s mission legitimacy...the narrator makes no initial statement of the problem or situation that Ezra is called to solve...one does learn the he leads people from Babylon to Jerusalem and that he has been given substantial authority.”<sup>40</sup> Historically it is generally excepted that,

“The Edict of Cyrus was issued in 539 BC, allowing all Jews to return from Babylonian captivity to rebuild the temple (Ezra 6:3-5)... Jeremiah 52:28-30 established the number of people returning during the first wave of post-exilic return as 4600. In 521 BC, King Darius put Zerubbabel in charge of rebuilding the

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<sup>38</sup> H.D.M Spence, *The Pulpit Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah, Ester*, ed. Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids: MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), ii-iii.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, ii-iii.

<sup>40</sup> George Thomas Osterfield, “Ezra and Nehemiah in the First Person.,” abstract (diss., Vanderbilt University, 2001), 52-98, in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses,

Temple in Jerusalem, at which point many Jews chose to return to the city in the second wave. In 520-515 BC, the Temple was built and stood until the second destruction in AD 70.”<sup>41</sup>

The research shows that most of the individuals that Ezra ministered to were simply copied from governmental documents and inserted into the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Nykolaishen determined that,

Most of the lists of names (e.g., Ezra 2:1-70; 8:1-14; Neh. 7:6-73; 11:3-24) were probably compiled years before Ezra-Nehemiah was written and simply inserted by the author where they suited his purpose. When the story involved decrees issued by a king, or letters sent between parties, the author chose in several instances to include the actual text of the documents rather than merely summarizing their contents (although he possibly did some paraphrasing of the wording, since that was acceptable within the conventions of ancient history writing). In Ezra 4:11-16, 17-22; 5:7-17; 6:6-12; 7:12-26, the letters are even presented in Aramaic, without translation into Hebrew. The use of documents can also be seen in the sections where Ezra and Nehemiah, although characters in the story, speak in the first person (e.g., Ezra 9:1-15; Neh. 1:1-2:20). It seems the author of the biblical book had access to records Ezra and Nehemiah had written about their activities and selected excerpts from them to include in his narrative. The large amount of source material incorporated into the book means that the number of words originating with the author—the amount of the text in the author’s voice—may be smaller than readers usually expect. However, the author usually does give enough introduction to the documents he uses that careful readers can see how they contribute to the flow of the story. In any case, readers need to think about how the documents and details chosen for inclusion relate to the message of a passage and of the book as whole, even if the author does not always spell it out as clearly as one might like.<sup>42</sup>

These recordings provide great insight into those Ezra would have been called to minister to and shows how detail oriented the mission of reestablishing worship had to be.

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<sup>41</sup> Stephanie Lynn Edgar, “Ritual as a prominent method in the second temple period for teaching children obedience to god.” (diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/2054024443?accountid=12085>.

<sup>42</sup> Douglas J E. Nykolaishen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 4.



As for a time frame of the ministry of Ezra there are various discrepancies.

According to Nykolaishen,

the first event in the book happens in 538 BC, and the last event sometime between 432 and 424 BC. From this span of over a hundred years, the author has selected episodes or events that occurred within eight discrete years. This makes it clear that the story is very selective, including only those things the author thought had relevance for what he was trying to teach readers, and his aim was not to provide a complete history of the period.<sup>43</sup>

Yet Rawlinson claims that

the last event recorded in the Book of Ezra is the reformation of religion effected through Ezra's influence in the spring of B.C. 457, the year after his arrival in Jerusalem. The date of B.C. 457 is therefore the earliest that can be assigned to it. It may have been written a year or a few years subsequently but can scarcely be given a later date than B.C. 444, the year of Nehemiah's arrival; since, if that event had taken place when the author was writing, he would almost certainly have mentioned it."<sup>44</sup>

No matter what the time frame, it is clear that the ministry of Ezra lasted for many years and impacted multiple generations. This time frame means that parents who lived during the time of the Babylonian exile would have seen the effects of Ezra's ministry passed on to the third and fourth generation before all those who were present would have passed away.

Now that the timeline has been discussed, one can begin to look at the events that took place throughout Ezra's ministry. As the book of Ezra begins the temple in Jerusalem "is in ruins and the Jewish community is in exile in Babylon because of the unfaithfulness of their ancestors. But they also know of God's promise to bring them back to the land of Judea and restore his blessing to them there if they return to him. The

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.,5.

<sup>44</sup> George Rawlinson, *The Pulpit Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, ed. H.D.M Spence (Grand Rapids: MI: WM. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950), 7: ii.

author tells the story against this spiritual background.”<sup>45</sup> Enter Zerubbabel, who is charged with rebuilding the temple and is a descendant of King David. His role is seen in how,

The books of Haggai and Zechariah record prophecies that attach great expectations to Zerubbabel. Haggai frequently refers to him as governor of Judah (e.g., Hag. 1:1) and addresses him directly with a promise from God that the second temple will have glory greater than the first (Hag. 2:4-9). Above all, God says he has chosen Zerubbabel and adds, “I will make you like my signet ring” (Hag. 2:23), implying that God will invest him with divine authority. Zechariah gives Zerubbabel special prominence both in laying the foundation of the temple and in completing it, attributing these achievements to God’s special enabling (Zech. 4:6-10). Such distinction was usually reserved for kings in the ancient Near East. In Ezra, by contrast, Zerubbabel has a much lower profile. Even the title of governor is never attached to his name. Whereas Haggai and Zechariah foresee the continuation of the Davidic royal line in Zerubbabel, which will ultimately culminate in Jesus Christ, Ezra does not give as much prominence to this theme, since Zerubbabel himself never became king, and since the temple restoration narrative highlights the participation of the whole community. Yet Zerubbabel is listed first among the temple rebuilders, and he is routinely identified as the son of Shealtiel, which draws attention to his Davidic lineage. For the original readers of Ezra, Zerubbabel’s prophesied role as descendant of David was significant, but many of its dimensions were not clearly fulfilled within his own lifetime.<sup>46</sup>

It was Zerubbabel who led the beginning of the reconstruction efforts and not Ezra.

Therefore, it is important to note that Ezra’s ministry would have begun in Babylon well before the majority of the exiles returned. Not only was the temple being restored before Ezra arrived, but the walls of Jerusalem were also being constructed by Nehemiah. This account is recorded in Nehemiah 1-7 which describes Nehemiah’s “efforts to travel to Jerusalem and lead a project to rebuild the ruined city wall...Nehemiah 8-13 is an account of the Judean community’s commitment to obey God’s law and provide for worship at the Jerusalem temple.”<sup>47</sup> Throughout all of this, “Opposition from outside the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>47</sup> Nykolaishen, 8.

Judean community is encountered, but God empowers the Judeans to overcome the obstacles and clearly achieve the objective.”<sup>48</sup> During this time of external tribulation, Ezra is entrusted with the task of helping the returning exiles focus on spiritual turmoil that is taking place within their hearts. These were the backdrops that were present during the ministry of Ezra and are vital to one’s understanding of that ministry.

The final area of background that one must understand before looking at the ministry of Ezra is the area of authorship of the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. The question needs to be asked, “who exactly did write Ezra-Nehemiah? Jewish tradition recorded in the Talmud claims it was written by Ezra. He did write much of the text included in Ezra 7-10, and he may even have been the author who composed Ezra-Nehemiah in its final form, but there is nothing in the book itself that indicates who composed it.”<sup>49</sup> With all of this background information in mind one can now begin to look at the ministry Ezra had during this time.

### **Ezra Studying the Word**

The first ministry that Ezra preformed was studying the Word of God in order to teach others how to properly worship God. Ezra needed to fulfill this calling because the people were in desperate need of understanding biblical worship after returning from an exile that was a result of ungodly worship. In order to understand the Jewish community that was present in Babylon at the beginning of Ezra and Nehemiah, one needs to read 2 Chronicles 36:15-21 <sup>50</sup> which states,

The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>49</sup> Rawlinson, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Nykolaishen, 7.

mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy. Therefore, he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their youths with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or young woman, the aged or the feeble; he gave them all into his hand. All the vessels of the house of God, large and small, and the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, all these he brought to Babylon. They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the Word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept the sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

This scripture makes it clear that the Jewish community understood that “their ancestors had disobeyed God and refused to listen to the prophets God had sent to warn them of impending judgement. Eventually God brought the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar to attack and destroy the Jerusalem temple, the city wall, and much else in the city also. Many people were killed, and others were taken into exile in Babylon.”<sup>51</sup> When the exiles finally returned there was a need to study not only the Word of God, but also a list of those who had returned from exile. These names found in “Ezra 2:1-70;8:1-14 and Neh. 7:6-73; 11:3-24 were probably compiled years before Ezra-Nehemiah was written and simply inserted by the author where they suited his purpose.”<sup>52</sup> These exiles needed someone who had studied the Word of God to help them learn how to worship all over again. The biblical person of Ezra, “is a fine example of a great teacher in Israel. He had the proper preparation and was gifted by the Lord for his ministry (Ezra 7:6). He set his heart to seek the Torah of Yahweh, to practice it in his own life, and to teach the statutes and ordinances of the law in Israel. Ezra 7:10 sets forth a biblical philosophy of Christian

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.,7.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.,4.

education.<sup>53</sup> Ezra 7:10 states, “For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.” This calling was one that reflected more the calling of a priest than a prophet. It is important to understand that

there is a difference between a prophet and a priest. A prophet tells about God to man. A priest tells about man to God. A prophet acts for God before men. A priest acts for men before God. The Apostle gives us the definition of a priest: He is taken from among men. He is ordained for men. He is ordained, set apart, for men, in the things of God. He is to offer gifts and sacrifices for men. He is to be full of compassion for the ignorant and those who have fallen by the wayside. (Hebrews 5:12.).<sup>54</sup>

Based on this description of the role of a priest, Ezra was clearly set apart to teach the prescribed way to worship God instead of delivering a new message that would alter worship during this time. This task would prove to be monumental in that it is the first time that one individual is tasked with reinstituting worship across all generational lines. In the past multiple families would have passed down these worship traditions, but at this point in most of the Jews lives they had all but forgotten how to worship God and could not pass on anything of solidity in the realm of worshiping God. As a result, Ezra did not only have to study to be a priest, but he also studied to be a scribe in order to clearly document how the Jews were to biblically worship God. The importance of

the development of writing systems in the ancient Near East led to the rise of a professional class of scribes, and this held true for Hebrew society in Old Testament times. In pre-exilic Israel these official secretaries were key figures in both religious and civic administration (cf. 2 Sam. 8:16-17; 20:23-26). During the period of the Hebrew monarchies the scribes functioned as “diplomats” in a way, since their expertise in the languages and literature of the day facilitated international correspondence (cf. 2 Kings 18:18-26). The scribes also wrote personal letters and public documents (e.g., Isa. 50:1; Jer. 36:18) and recorded

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<sup>53</sup> J Carl Laney, *Ezra and Nehemiah* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 15.

<sup>54</sup> I.M. Haldeman, *The Tabernacle Priesthood and Offerings* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), 249.

legal, military, and financial Literature for the monarchy (cf. 1 Kings 4:3; 2 Kings 22:3-4; 2 Chron. 24:11; 2 Chron. 26:11). The Levites also served as scribes and recorders for the temple (2 Chron. 34:13, 15). After the fall of the Hebrew monarchies, the scribal class in postexilic Israel was tied solely to the temple and more narrowly focused as to function. These temple scribes were essentially a class of scholars who devoted themselves to copying, preserving, publishing, and interpreting the Law of Moses for the Hebrew people. Ezra is often identified as the precursor of the scribal class (Ezra 7:1-10). By New Testament times, the scribes formed a powerful religious and political class in Judaism. They became major opponents of the ministry of Jesus, accusing him of violating Jewish law (cf. Matt. 23:2).<sup>55</sup>

With this in mind one can begin to look at two ways that Ezra studied for his calling. First, he was a descendant of Aaron, the first high priest of Israel, and would have learned from his family. As a result, Ezra was among the few during the exile period who would have had parents who took the time to pass on how to worship God. Ezra 7:1-5 shows this heritage of faithful parents when it discloses Ezra's genealogical line. It states, "After this, in the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of the chief priest Aaron." It is easy to glance over genealogies found within scripture, but if one does so he or she might miss wonderful truths that can be imparted through them. Ezra 7:1-5 points out that, "Lengthy genealogies in the Bible were usually attached to important persons, and this is one of the longest genealogies given for an individual in an Old Testament narrative, so the reader is being signaled that the character entering the narrative here is special."<sup>56</sup> He was special because his forefathers passed on the role of high priest to him and instructed him on how

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<sup>55</sup> Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 278.

<sup>56</sup> Nykolaishen, 7.

to study and teach the law. Due to this genealogical account, it would have been clear to those within Ezra's family just how important it was to preserve God honoring worship as described in the Law of Moses.

The second way that Ezra studied the Word was through devotion. He could not simply depend on his forefather's faith, but had to make a point to devote himself to learning as much as possible about worship in order to fulfill the calling placed on his life. As Ezra 7:10 states, "For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel." Through the faith of his forefathers, and his own devotion to the law of the Lord, Ezra began to teach that law to the returning exiles. Ezra's ministry was birthed out of his devotion to God's Word and

illustrates an approach to be emulated by all believers. The three ways he is said to interact with it remain applicable today. First, there is no substitute for careful study...Second, study is not merely for the sake of knowledge but must translate into personal application. Scripture is intended to change our lives, including our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Finally, what is learned and practiced must also be communicated.<sup>57</sup>

By drawing out principles, such as these, a model begins to form for ways that believers can go about studying God's Word. This amount of study should be used to teach others, which leads one to observe how Ezra taught the Law of the Lord.

### **Ezra Teaching the Word**

Ezra could have kept all of his knowledge to himself, but he was devoted to God's calling and desired to teach others what he had learned through his times of study. When talking about how Ezra taught, one needs to consider the impact that Isaiah's prophecy would have had on his ministry. Due to "his familiarity with Isaiah's prophecy, Ezra is

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 80.

able to recognize how events occurring around him contribute to the fulfillment of God's promises."<sup>58</sup> With this knowledge in his mind and heart Ezra also takes advantage of the political climate that he is surrounded by in order to teach. This is seen when "governmental policy advances the work of the church without requiring compromise, it is welcome. But political complexities do not allow governments to become reliable partners in God's work. All of these perspectives and motivations result from the priority of God's Word in Ezra's life."<sup>59</sup> Ezra understood that the government could be used by God to accomplish what God's will was for the returning exiles and Ezra was not afraid to use this incredible blessing as a time to teach freely in a time and place where freedom was scarce. One of the ways he used this freedom was to become a scribe in order to write down and compile God's law for it to be taught for generations to come. It is important to understand what it meant for Ezra to be a scribe at this time. Ezra ministered

in a society where only one percent of the population before seventh century BC could read..., the rise of a class of professional readers and writers is understandable. These scribes, trained in wisdom circles as advisers and administrators, and thoroughly familiar with the cultural and religious traditions of Israel (Horsley 2007:71-87), were mostly in the employment of the royal court (Schniedewind 2004:98) or the temple (Van der Toorn 2007:82). In particular, the Levitical scribes composed, copied, transmitted, and explained the religious texts of the pre-exilic traditions.<sup>60</sup>

Ezra fulfilled this calling and was well trained due to his time in exile and service to the foreign kings. With this skill in hand, "Ezra 7-10 tells about Ezra coming from Babylon to Jerusalem to ensure that the Judeans understand God's law and live by it. The surrounding people do not oppose this mission directly, but they represent a temptation

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 78.



that leads to some Judeans disobeying God’s law. Ezra does see some progress, but the success of his mission is not completely clear.”<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to see how the surrounding peoples did not oppose the education of God’s law directly, but did oppose the building of the wall and temple in Jerusalem. One possible reason for this is that they were afraid of corporate intergenerational worship and how it would cause them to lose their power over the Judean region.<sup>62</sup> It is easy to keep people oppressed when they are not gathered around a common belief and simply worshipping in silence and solitude, but it is another thing entirely when people become united and stand together in their worship of God publicly.

Ezra did not simply depend on his skill as a scribe as the only means for teaching since he knew he was able to teach publicly. Instead he used others to help him in his mission of reestablishing worship as prescribed by the Word of God. Through “understanding how God prepared the character and the context of Ezra’s life, it is now possible to take a look at the three major vignettes of Ezra’s leadership: Ezra recruited and trained leaders, called the leaders to follow God’s standards, and taught the people God’s Word.”<sup>63</sup> After this he asked the returning exiles to assemble for corporate worship through the Word. This event happened around the seventh month when the “Jews gathered to receive instruction in the Mosaic law. Ezra, the priest-scribe, read and

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<sup>61</sup> Hill, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Mary Owens, *Layman's Bible Book Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1983), 44.

<sup>63</sup> Justin Allen Smith, “Following the Ways of Ezra: An exploratory study of the relationship between a senior pastor's involvement in leading sunday school and church health.” (diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1664051182?accountid=12085>. 50.

interpreted the law in such a way that his listeners understood the meaning (v8). The people showed their respect for God's law by standing attentively while it was read (v5)."<sup>64</sup> This would have been one powerful worship service that took place. The people were so hungry for the Word of God that they stood all day long and ignored distractions because they desired to worship God. It is noted that "the next day the family heads, together with the priests and Levites, gathered to make a further study of the Mosaic law. During the study they discovered instructions for a celebration that they had apparently forgotten, the Feasts of Booths."<sup>65</sup> This is when Ezra took the lead and began to instruct the people on how to worship God through this festival. To do so he recruited the help of his fellow Levites. He gave them instructions and,

in keeping with their instructions, the people gathered branches of olive, pine, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees from which to build the booths. Those who resided in Jerusalem set up booths on their flat rooftops and courts. Presumably the priests and Levites placed booths in the court of the Temple. People who lived outside Jerusalem used the area of the Gate of Ephraim (v.16).<sup>66</sup>

The people continued in this worship and "each day during the celebration Ezra read aloud from the Mosaic law. A solemn assembly followed the seven days of the Feast of Booths. During a holy day, such as the solemn assembly, the people did not work."<sup>67</sup>

With this in mind, teaching in times of assembly becomes the norm for Ezra to communicate the Word of the Lord. It is observed that,

The book of Nehemiah, which marks the beginning of the Jews' return from exile in the early sixth century BC, gives a moving and vivid account of such an assembly, where, in the open air, Ezra the scribe stood in a wooden pulpit which they made for the purpose' to read from the Book of the Law. During these times of teaching the Israelites began to develop many forms of worship. When

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<sup>64</sup> Owens, 55.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 55.

postexilic Israel began their worship of the Word, it changed their lives. And they worshipped at the feet of Ezra the priest, and they unwittingly provide all future generations with a model of corporate worship that pleases God. They stood reverently before the Lord; they wept tears of joy *and* repentance; they knelt in deference; they raised their hands; they shouted; they celebrated—all because of the Word of the Lord. It convicted them. It cleansed them.<sup>68</sup>

From these times of corporate worship, one begins to see a model for intergenerational worship develop. First, “the People Listened Attentively. Ezra the priest brought out the Teachings...All who could listen and understand had gathered (v.2 NCV). And listen they did. As Ezra stood on a high wooden platform, facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read aloud from daybreak until noon.”<sup>69</sup> The Water Gate location cannot be overlooked. Ezra chose this location most likely because it was an open area where all men, women, and children of all ages could gather to hear the Word of God proclaimed. He did not choose the temple because, as was the tradition, the temple was a place of division in worship and he was called to teach all generations and genders at the same time. Second, they also performed physical forms of worship which is seen when they stood in reverence. Here, “Ezra opened the book in full view of everyone, because he was above them. As he opened it, all the people stood up” (Neh. 8:5 NCV).<sup>70</sup> How powerful it must have been to see all generations and families standing together to honor God’s Word by standing for such a long period of time! It is also worth noting that Ezra was standing above them with the Word of God elevated in a high position. When teaching God’s Word, Ezra understood the importance of making the Word the central focus of the gathering. After this, “Ezra praised the Lord, the great God, and all the people held up

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<sup>68</sup> Vernon M. Whaley, *Called to Worship: The Biblical Foundations of Our Response to God’s Call* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 148.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

their hands” (v.6 NCV). When the priests saw that the people had risen to their feet in impulsive worship, they began to praise God. Then the people began to express their own praise—with uplifted hands.”<sup>71</sup> The priests, who were in charge of teaching worship to the masses, were taught a lesson themselves when they saw the returning exiles stand in a time of intergenerational worship to honor God’s Word. Here one can begin to understand that corporate intergenerational worship can be a powerful time of learning more about God for the lay-person just as much as those ministering to them. Next, they were not afraid to make their worship vocal and “they Shouted, ‘Amen!’”. “[Then] all the people ...said, Amen! Amen!” (v.6b NCV). As old Ezra shouted his enthusiastic praises to God, the people agreed with all that they were hearing. So, they joined in the worship, participating with their priest: ‘Amen’”.<sup>72</sup> Amen, which is a common expression to use in times of agreement, was an important act of worship for the returning exiles due to the fact that for generations their families had not been in agreement with God. Now during this time of worship they lifted their voices to state their agreement with God’s law. Following this they prostrated themselves as “they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground (v6b NCV). Not only did God’s people stand together and shout amen together, but they also bowed low and worshipped—together.”<sup>73</sup> This element of bowing down in worship was important for the returning exiles who most likely watched their parents and grandparents bow down to worship to a golden statue made in the image of Nebuchadnezzar as recorded in Daniel chapter three. Now the Jewish people were finally able to bow down to the one true God despite what they had

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.,143.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.,144.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.,144.

seen from their ancestors. While all of this was going on Ezra was teaching, and “the priests read the scripture. ‘[The] Levites... read from the Book of the Teachings of God and explained what it meant so the people understood what was being read’ (vv7-8 NCV).”<sup>74</sup> Then one of the most powerful moments of intergenerational worship took place. All generations gathered together to worship the Lord in spite of their preferences. Some remembered what worship was like and lamented, but they stayed and worshiped alongside of those who rejoiced at the fact they were worshiping God in the original way that he desired. This time of godly grief and sorrow was demonstrated as “the people wept...As the Word came forth, the people’s hearts were enlightened, and they realized how much they had missed—how much their children had missed—by being separated from God. They wept—bitter tears of grief, but at the same time, tears of joy also.”<sup>75</sup> While some were weeping others were so excited that “they celebrated...They were glad they had heard the Word. God had revealed Himself through it. They were glad to repent. It brought freedom; the chains of their long-enduring sin were broken. And they were glad to be forgiven. It brought restoration. Their fellowship with God was renewed.”<sup>76</sup> These times of corporate worship that Ezra taught would lay a foundation for worshipers to follow all the way from his time to well after the time of Christ. However, Ezra’s ministry did not end with simply teaching the word; he also enacted the Word.

### **Ezra Enacting the Word**

The times of teaching by Ezra and his fellow priests did not end with simply teaching the people how to worship; it also led them to empower the people to worship

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.,145.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.,145.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.,147.

through further development of synagogues which began in the exilic time period. By taking what they had been taught the returning exiles watched as Ezra reestablished the temple life of old, and also encouraged the continuation of synagogues and passing on biblical faith in the Lord. In regard to these times of worship, “the Bible provides ample evidence of the gradual development of synagogue worship, with its origins in the period of Babylonian captivity known as the exile. But although the distinction between synagogue (the institution) and synagogue (a building) is an important one, the word itself simply means ‘place of assembly’.”<sup>77</sup> Ezra’s teaching can clearly be seen in the models that took hold within the synagogue system. Everything, even “the style of worship in synagogues was based on the practices of the temple, though moderated by omitting the sacrificial acts and rituals (these were replaced in the synagogue by prayers or readings referring to sacrifice, there being no altar).”<sup>78</sup> Even though the ideas surrounding these times of worship symbolized the sacrificial system of the temple, the laypeople whom Ezra would have instructed were the ones who went out and passed on what they had learned about worship. They were the ones who asked Ezra to teach them and proved that “the initiative for reading the law comes from the laypeople, not Ezra or the priests. This is somewhat similar to, but perhaps even more impressive than Ezra 10:2-4, where laypeople-initiated action about mixed marriages.”<sup>79</sup> This layperson-led ministry showed how the ministry of Ezra had prepared the Jews to continue in Synagogue worship which, “was organized and conducted by laypeople and not by a

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<sup>77</sup> Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music: From Gregorian Chant to Black Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 22.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> Nykolaishen, 158.

hereditary priesthood. Services consisted of readings from the Law and from the Prophets, of psalmody, teaching, prayer, and final blessings.”<sup>80</sup> The people were clearly hungry for the Word of God and desired to be taught how to worship. The lessons they learned led them to enact their faith just like Ezra. His passion for studying the Word and doing what it said was contagious.

All of these elements of worship can clearly be seen in the ministry of Ezra through the reading of scripture and in the arena of music. The worship and musical side of these gatherings involved

the psalms, prayers and readings that would be cantillated, that is, recited in a heightened speech resembling simple song. Its basis was the chanting of the text on a single note, but with simple melodic alterations to indicate the grammatical structure...Synagogue music needed the skilled leadership of a cantor, whose sole responsibility it became in later times.<sup>81</sup>

These cantors would be the predecessors of modern worship and music leaders today.

These skilled musicians would have been taught by many of the Levites that study under Ezra and the other priests. Through Ezra demonstrating how worship should be practiced, generations for years to come would continue to model and develop their worship services after his example. As for the music after

the postexilic period temple was rebuilt (515 B.C.), the psalms were again used as liturgies, but also continued as sacred literature. In fact, during and after the exilic period the whole focus of Israel’s religion began to shift. In the pre-exilic period, the temple was the primary locus of Yahweh’s revelation, but from the crisis of the exile a second locus developed in Yahweh’s written ‘torah.’ This term is usually translated ‘law’ but more accurately rendered by the broader term, ‘instruction.’ This shift was evidenced by Ezra’s public readings of ‘the book of the law of Moses’ (Ezra 7:10; Neh. 8:1-3; 10:29) and the subsequent emergence of Judaism. A new kind of psalmody developed, namely literary psalms—those that were not used in a liturgical service but were simply read for public or private meditation. Psalm 119, a torah psalm whose verses begin with the successive

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<sup>80</sup> Wilson-Dickson, 22.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 22.

letters of the Hebrew alphabet (an ‘acrostic’), clearly exemplifies this use. Thus, postexilic Yahwism had two foci, the temple and torah. The temple symbolized encounter with God, that is, ‘seeing his face’. The torah symbolized ‘hearing’ God’s words. The former has the implicit danger of ritualism, the latter of legalism. For both to be helpful sacraments, worshipers and readers must remember the greater reality to which these symbols point.<sup>82</sup>

Ezra demonstrated these two focal points of seeing God’s face and hearing God’s word through all of the years of study and preparation that he went through. He understood that in order to enact and obey God’s Word, one must first prepare to hear from God and be willing to obey. In the realm of worship leadership, Ezra’s teachings had long lasting impacts on worship and how it would be done throughout the newly restored promised land, but it would ultimately come down to the people’s willingness to obey God through times of spiritual renewal that would cement his leadership skills.

The people saw their leader Ezra enact the Word through musical worship and replicated what he did. They also saw him take the lead in the realm of spiritual renewal. Ezra understood that the importance of the messianic line could not be tainted. Ezra clearly enacted temple and synagogue worship, but he also used this time to purify the returning exiles from sinful marriages that the Lord had warned them about. Ezra understood

the manner in which the Lord God, after the lapse of the seventy years of exile, fulfilled His promise announced by the prophets, by the deliverance of His people from Babylon, the building of the temple at Jerusalem, and the restoration of the temple worship according to the law, and preserved the re-assembled community from fresh relapses into heathen customs and idolatrous worship by the dissolution of the marriages with Gentile women.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms: Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 6.

<sup>83</sup> C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentaries On the Old Testament: Ezra, Nehemiah, Ester* (Grand Rapids: MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 4-5.



Like worship in today's society, Ezra had to take a stand for biblically based worship. His ministry truly enacted the Word of God and demonstrated that,

the restoration of the temple and of the legal temple worship, and the separation of the heathen from the newly settled community, were necessary and indispensable conditions for the gathering out of the people of God from among the heathen, and for the maintenance and continued existence of the nation of Israel, to which and through which God might at His own time fulfill and realize His promises made to their forefathers, to make their seed a blessing to all the families of the earth, in a manner consistent both with His dealings with this people hitherto, and with the further development of His promises made through the prophets.<sup>84</sup>

Ezra, through the power of God, helped restore biblical worship and the messianic blood line. Ezra was the main vessel in the Judean region; God had already been preparing for these events and working through the hearts and minds of the rulers of the time in order to see that Ezra's ministry would be a success. Here one sees that "the significance of the book of Ezra in sacred history lies in the fact that it enables us to perceive how the Lord, on the one hand, so disposed the hearts of the kings of Persia, the rulers of the world, that in spite of all the machinations of the enemies of God's people..."<sup>85</sup> Through these rulers God stirred their hearts to help promote

the building of His temple in Jerusalem, and the maintenance of His worship therein; and on the other, raised up His people when delivered from Babylon, men like Zerubbabel their governor, Joshua the high priest, and Ezra the scribe, who, supported by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, undertook the work to which they were called, with hearty resolution, and carried it out with a powerful hand.<sup>86</sup>

All of these men were called by God to rekindle the worship of God's people and to help them avoid the mistakes of past generations.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.,4.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.,5.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.,5.

By simply studying the Word and teaching the Word, the ministry of Ezra demonstrates how, “both Ezra and the Gospel accounts show readers that God can be relied on to work through human actions to bring about the restored relationship he has promised with those who will trust him.”<sup>87</sup> Even though all of the generations present during the return to Israel were raised by individuals who disobeyed God under ungodly rulers, it is important to notice the shift that happened once the people saw God work to bring them back into fellowship with Him. Ezra’s ministry led the people to read and study the scriptures more in order to fulfill the law that their ancestors neglected. This devotion to “the reading of the Scriptures in public worship is highly significant. The following biblical examples demonstrate the importance of Scripture in corporate worship.”<sup>88</sup> Nehemiah 8:5-6 states how, “Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood. Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God; and all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen,’ lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.” However, most of the people could not read, so they still needed ministers like Ezra to explain how they should worship, and also how to pass on their faith. After the Babylonian exile, “Aramaic was the common language of the day and since many Jews did not understand Hebrew, Ezra would read the Scripture, then explain its meaning.”<sup>89</sup> Ezra truly lived to teach biblical worship and show the Jews how to live out their faith. He accomplished this portion of his ministry by simply telling the

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<sup>87</sup> Nykolaishen, 14.

<sup>88</sup> Franklin M. Segler and C Randall Bradley, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Pub. Group, 2006), 130.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

people the Word of the Lord just like he did when he was teaching. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah provide

an excellent example of the way in which Israel retold old stories to address new situations in the life of God's people. The disastrous events of 587 B.C., which included the destruction of the temple, the end of the Davidic monarchy and Israel as a political entity, not to mention the deportation of the youth of the population into exile in Babylon, had necessitated a radical reassessment of Israel's identity and relationship with God.<sup>90</sup>

Ezra answered and elaborated on questions that the people had. They needed to understand why God had sent them into exile, and why it seemed like the gods of Babylon appeared to be victorious. They were unsure if they were still considered to be the chosen people of God and wondered if God would still deliver them. They needed to know if God remembered the promises to Abraham and David.<sup>91</sup> Any one of these questions would be overwhelming to most, but Ezra stood firm on the Word of God and as a result helped the people break with the sins of their past and begin a renewed relationship with the Lord. Ezra affirmed that "the tremendous theological responses engineered by the exile, through varied and arising out of differing perspectives within the community, were united in interpreting these events as God's judgement on an unrepentant Israel in fulfillment of the prophetic warnings and resulting in a clean break with the past."<sup>92</sup> It was time for the Israelites to begin being the chosen people they were called to be and worship the one true God instead of running from idol to idol as their ancestors had done.

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<sup>90</sup> Mark A. Throntveit, *Ezra-nehemiah* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1992), 11.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Ezra enacted the word and prepared the Jews to fulfill their calling through the “reordering of Hebrew society which had far-reaching implications for civil and religious life.”<sup>93</sup> Ezra and the people knew that things had to change in order to obey God and as a result many of their marriages and spiritual disciplines would be called into question. At this point,

two primary concerns shaped the reform of the restoration community. The first was the prevention of another Hebrew exile, since another loss of the land of covenant promise was unthinkable. The second was the preservation of the ethnic identity of the Hebrew people while they languished beneath the Persian yoke in a fringe province surrounded by hostile foreign nations.<sup>94</sup>

After years of disobedience, the people now realized that hard sacrifices would have to be made. Their preferences would have to be sacrificed in order to purify themselves before God. Some would try to resist this as noted by the prophets of the time, but in the end, despite the opposition, measures were taken to reestablish God honoring worship. These

specific measures taken by Ezra and Nehemiah to ensure Israelite possession of the land of the promise included: the covenant ceremony (Neh. 9:38—10:27), the rehabilitation of the priesthood (Ezra 10:18-44), the reinstatement of temple ritual and Sabbath observance (Neh. 8:13-18; 13:15-22), and the introduction of the Law of Moses as the rule of community life (Neh. 8:1-12).<sup>95</sup>

The renovations to the worship of God did not end with the corporate aspect, but also went into the individual family situations. Where “attempts to maintain the ethnic purity of the post-exilic Israelite community included social and economic reforms based on covenant principles (Neh. 11:1-2; 13:10-14), renewed emphasis on the ceremonial purity

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<sup>93</sup> Andrew Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise: Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Books, 1993), 44.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

of the entire populace of Jerusalem (Neh. 10:28-39), and the divorce and expulsion of foreigners from the assembly of God (Ezra 10:1-8; Neh. 9:1-5; 13:1-3).”<sup>96</sup> The two key ways that Ezra enacted the word of God is now seen through the way that he led the exiles to reestablish biblical worship and had them purify the people of ungodly foreign marriages. These two methods were both necessary in correcting years upon years of unbiblical worship.

### **Single-Parent Families**

Ezra’s ministry was far-reaching and impacted every family type present in the Jewish community. As a result, single parents would have been among those in the crowd during times of intergenerational worship at the temple. With this in mind it is important to think about how intergenerational worship can impact such a demographic present today in the church as it would have been during the time of the second temple. The church needs to be aware that 40% of all parents are single parents, which is around 13.6 million individuals.<sup>97</sup> This vast population should not be overlooked by the church today. Instead by using principles present in the ministry of Ezra one can begin to see how single-parent families cannot only help in terms of generational worship, but also be impacted by it. Throughout Scripture there are examples of single parents, and these examples would have been studied by Ezra as he ministered to the returning exiles. One example is the story of Hagar, an Egyptian that became pregnant by Abraham, and was eventually outcast to raise Ishmael on her own. This story can be seen in its entirety in Genesis 16. However, the principles that can be drawn from the story have clear

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>97</sup> Table for One Ministries. “The Joys of Being a Parent,” Table for One Ministries, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://tfoministries.org/christian-single-parents/>.

implications to single parents today. It is clear that when Hagar, cried out to God, He drew near. Hagar called the Lord “the God who sees me (Genesis 16:31). Despite how lonely single parenting may be at times, those who know the Lord can take comfort in remembering that they are never alone. God promises to be a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows and orphans (Psalm 68:5).”<sup>98</sup> Yet another example that Ezra would have been familiar with is the story of Lot and how he raised his children after his wife died because she disobeyed God. This story in its entirety can be found in Genesis 19. Through the story one can possibly see the consequences of being a single parent that does not raise his or her children in a godly manner. Lot’s daughters, “had embraced the values of Sodom and Gomorrah. They got their father drunk and committed incest with him. Each became pregnant by Lot, creating one of the messiest family situations ever recorded. Single parents can learn from the mistake that Lot made in raising his children with the world’s values.”<sup>99</sup> Ezra, knowing these stories, would have taken this into consideration when the returning exiles came to him with questions about parenting. Combined with these biblical examples in mind and all of the information gathered about Ezra, one can begin to see practical ways that single-parent families can be impacted by intergenerational worship through inclusion, support, intergenerational service, and spiritual growth.

While any member of the church can benefit from being included, inclusion specifically impacts the single-parent families by making them feel like they are not an

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<sup>98</sup> Got Questions Ministries. “What Does the Bible Say About Single-Parents / Parenting?,” Got Questions, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.gotquestions.org/single-parenting.html>, 1.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.,1.

ostracized demographic within the church. The Church needs to see that, “there is a need for redefining what we mean by the word ‘family’. The term should include more than the father-mother-children unit. Paul’s attention to the treatment of fellow believers as family members (1 Timothy 5:1-8) should move us toward a more closely knit Christian fellowship that overrides biological barriers.”<sup>100</sup> With the demands on parents today the church needs to be a safe haven that can include ministries that support single parents. This is especially true for those who are, “working to be both father and mother, feel overwhelmed in going it alone, and are tempted to abdicate their parental responsibilities and let neighbors, relatives, or the state raise their children. It takes extra work, but the single parent must learn how to raise his or her children ‘in the training and instruction of the Lord’ (Ephesians 6:4).”<sup>101</sup> In terms of intergenerational worship, the Church can help single parents with their children’s biblical knowledge and worship in a way that the community and government agencies cannot. It is vital for the church to help single parents feel included due to the sheer number of single parents currently within the body of Christ. Statistics show that in America alone, nearly three out of ten families are led by a single parent. Four out of ten are children born to single women.<sup>102</sup> It is also important for the church to realize that it is not only single mothers but also single fathers who need to be included in times of intergenerational worship because, “males are the fastest

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<sup>100</sup> T B. Maston and William M. Tillman, *The Bible and Family Relations* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1983), 128.

<sup>101</sup> Got Questions Ministries. “What Does the Bible Say About Single-Parents / Parenting?,” Got Questions, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.gotquestions.org/single-parenting.html>.

<sup>102</sup> Thom S. Rainer. “Five Fascinating Facts About Single-Parent Families for Church Leaders,” Thom S. Rainer, May 26, 2014, <https://thomrainer.com/2014/05/five-fascinating-facts-single-parent-families-church-leaders/>.

growing category of single parents. I think most of us are surprised at this development. The implications for churches are staggering.”<sup>103</sup>

Once the church understands the growing need for including single-parent families, they must then understand God’s role in these relationships. It is wise,

to remember that God created our children and has a plan for their lives. They were entrusted to us, regardless of our family situation, and their Creator expects us to take the responsibility to raise them in a godly manner. Single parents may find this more difficult than those with partners, but when they engage the help of their brothers and sisters in Christ, their children can thrive.<sup>104</sup>

Scripture also teaches that, “God is indeed a father to the fatherless as with Ishmael, He will be there whenever he is needed, and will supply every necessity and much more. The father’s child will be hurt, yes. But neglected? No. That’s the way it was for Ishmael. That’s the way it will be for your children. That’s the way our heavenly father is and always will be. God never changes!”<sup>105</sup> The message here is clear, no matter what type of family is present within the Church God will always be the father to the fatherless. Since this truth will never change, the Church should be willing to model this fatherly love to all those who come to worship.

After this pastors and worship leaders should listen to single parents to see how the congregation can best include them into time of intergenerational worship. Some single parents have stated the need for the Church to, “recognize them as real families: Acknowledge single-parent families from the podium, cast vision to your church about God’s heart for the fatherless and widows, make sure pictures and references to family do

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.,1.

<sup>104</sup> Got Questions Ministries. “What Does the Bible Say About Single-Parents / Parenting?”,1.

<sup>105</sup> Gary Richmond, *Successful Single-Parenting* (Eugene, Or.: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 48.



not only feature two-parent families, and help us feel honored and valued instead of excluded or second class.”<sup>106</sup> The church should also avoid excluding single parents because of stereotypical issues surrounding singles. For example, the Church should avoid thinking that,

Single-parent families are subnormal and dysfunctional; parents who are single by virtue of divorce are second-class Christians and unworthy for important church roles; church is the happy family place— families in crisis please stay out of the lime light!; church is a “couples” world where singles are marginalized. In their daily efforts to give their best to their children, many single parents simply will not take them to churches where they risk being taught that their family life and parents are substandard and inferior to everyone else. While some churches do communicate those ideas, most do not impute inferiority to single-parent families and single parents should not assume they do. Faulty perceptions work in the other direction as well. Many people in church see single parents as too needy and a ministry to them posing a financial burden upon the congregation. The perception that kids from single-parent homes are “problem kids” and disruptive does not help, nor does the perception that single parents are desperate and therefore sexually promiscuous. And then there are the recurring questions: we don’t want to condone or encourage divorce do we? These parents (especially the attractive ones) with kids are looking for spouses—they might be interested in mine! Shouldn’t we spend that money on marriage enrichment instead? Do we want all of these grieving, needy widows casting a pall upon our church? We need to remember that two-parent families have problem kids, financial difficulties, and moral issues also. Accurate perspectives can remedy faulty stereotypical perceptions.<sup>107</sup>

By demonstrating inclusion and offering times of intergenerational worship like that offered in the model of Ezra, single-parent families should feel welcomed and as a result help the church grow as a body of believers in ways that they possibly would not if they excluded them from worship. As John 4:35 states, “open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” The fields are indeed ripe for harvest and this is no different in

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<sup>106</sup> Single-Parent Missions. “Top 10 Ministry Needs of Single-Parents,” Ministry to Single-Parent Families, accessed January 25, 2020, <http://singleparentmissions.com/ministry-to-single-parent-families>.

<sup>107</sup> Eric Fruge, “Single-Parent Family Ministry: Confronting the Obstacles,” Kentucky Baptist Convention, accessed January 25, 2020, <http://web.kybaptist.org/web/doc/Obstacles-single-ministry.pdf>, 1.

the realm of those who need to know Christ in the single-parent community. In America today, “there are approximately 9 million single parents not attending a local church. What a huge opportunity to grow your church!”<sup>108</sup> With this in mind inclusion of single-parent families within times of intergenerational worship should be the first step the Church should take in regard to ministering to the unique demographic within the Church.

The next area to consider is how the church can support single-parent families through times of intergenerational worship, and how single-parent families can support others in the congregation as well. The first direction that a pastor should go is in the direction of discovering the single-parent demographic within their own church and how they can best support them and encourage support and intergenerationality within times of worship. Using a survey could prove to be beneficial if needed to discover the congregations demographics.<sup>109</sup> By doing so the church will be better suited to support them in whatever needs they may have. This creates a conundrum which involves identifying the types of single parents that are members of the church or within the congregation and community. For example,

the Bible references several single parents... While some are thrust into the role of single parent by the death of a spouse, many others become single parents due to sexual immorality or divorce. While God’s intention was for children to be raised by both a mother and a father, He also has compassion on the parent who is raising a child on his or her own. God’s instructions about parenting apply equally to the single and to the married (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21).<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Jennifer Maggio, “5 Reasons Your Church Should Have a Single Moms Ministry,” crosswalk, March 27, 2012, <https://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/jennifer-maggio/5-reasons-your-church-should-have-a-single-moms-ministry.html>.

<sup>109</sup> Fruge, 2.

<sup>110</sup> Got Questions Ministries. “What Does the Bible Say About Single-Parents / Parenting?”, 1.

By understanding what types of single-parent families are present within the church, the church will then be able to find ways to support them as the functioning body of Christ. It is important to understand that, “Children who are growing up in a single-parent home need help redefining what family is for them personally. The concept of a team is often helpful. ‘We’re part of a team and we need to stick together, work hard, and enjoy our relationships.’ That mentality needs to permeate the single-parent home.”<sup>111</sup> By having single-parent support groups within the church they should be able to identify with this idea of camaraderie with their fellow Christians across all generations. As for the church, this idea can be learned from the support of single parents as well. One example of this can be seen in the area of practical budgeting. Here one can see how,

single parents are extremely busy. Between work, playing with their kids, school, housework, grocery shopping, house and car maintenance, church activities, child events like sports and music, illnesses, and a zillion unforeseen emergencies, they get worn out! Bear this in mind as you think creatively about single-parent family ministry. Single-parent families almost universally live on shoestring budgets.<sup>112</sup>

Another example is seen through how “Childcare is expensive and consumes a lot of a single-parent’s income. Single parents are survivors who learn how to manage their families. Do not be afraid to consult and listen to their wisdom. Sometimes it is nice to have a little break from kids and to interact with adults. Single parents with no family support to lean upon are usually the most open to ministry.”<sup>113</sup> With these examples in mind one should be hopeful that by reaching out and supporting single-parent families, they will in turn reach out and support those within the church as well.

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<sup>111</sup> National Center for Biblical Parenting. “Single-Parenting,” National Center for Biblical Parenting, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.biblicalparenting.org/pr-singleparenting.asp>.

<sup>112</sup> Fruge, 2.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 2.

Questions may arise about why it is so important for the church to even think about having an intergenerational support system for single-parent families. To answer that line of thinking one should consider that

These families represent the widows and orphans of this generation, and God is very specific, even redundant in his Word about how we as the Church are to care for them. Tragically, less than one percent of churches in America currently have a single-parent family ministry, which means millions of these hurting moms and dads and at-risk kids are still on the outside, desperate for help and wondering if God cares.<sup>114</sup>

In order to support each other as members of the body of Christ these times of intergenerational worship should be full of words of affirmation, stories of hope, free counseling if possible, financial assistance if needed, and household assistance if requested.<sup>115</sup> Oh what a worship service it would be to see the principles of Ezra's ministry applied to intergenerational worship alongside of times of support for single-parent families! With this in mind it is also a worthy to mention that the church needs to avoid making a singles ministry mentality within a single-parenting mentality. It is important to avoid,

confusion about the goals of single-parent family ministry. Some churches measure success by how many single parents they can get married, others by how many they can help avoid marriage or keep from dating. For some the goal goes no further than childcare, for others childcare help is nowhere on the radar screen. Others get hung up on whether it's best to mainstream single parents into the rest of the church or single them out and separate them into their own group. These approaches are vastly inferior to the proper goals of single-parent ministry, but it is sad how often churches reach no higher than that.<sup>116</sup>

A strong and clear understanding of single-parent ministry will help everyone avoid another problem that some churches have in regards to preferring,

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<sup>114</sup> Single-Parent Missions, 1.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>116</sup> Fruge, 3.

building programs and other less taxing ministries. Frankly, most pastors don't know what to do with the complex and never-ending problems faced by single parents. And they don't have time in their already busy schedules to find out. But things are changing. There is now a generation of elder churchmen and church women who have seen their own children's marriages just crumble. They have softened their hard positions on touchy marital issues. They are now willing to find innovative ways to help<sup>117</sup>

When hearts like these are softened, an intergenerational congregation will begin to see the single-parent family as the modern-day widow and orphan. They will begin to have a heart for the fatherless just like the Lord's heart. They will also hopefully come to understand that single-parent ministries do not endorse unbiblical marriage practices, but merely provides godly support from mothers and fathers of all generations.<sup>118</sup>

Finally, when these times of intergenerational support are implemented the church should take into consideration how best to counsel those that have become single parents through tragic events such as death or divorce. No matter the situation, "the church can aid individuals in dealing with the ensuing grief process which follows the break in a relationship. Helping such singles to know how to deal with loneliness can be especially significant. Likewise, they can be helped to understand whether a marriage should be considered as an option at some later time."<sup>119</sup> Through these times all generations within the church should support single parents by helping them, "get through emergencies. Their benevolence fund may enable you to fix your car, pay your electric bill, or provide necessary school clothes for your children. Some churches have a food

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<sup>117</sup> Richmond, 74.

<sup>118</sup> Jennifer Magio, "5 Reasons Your Church Should Have a Single Moms Ministry," crosswalk, March 27, 2012, <https://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/jennifer-maggio/5-reasons-your-church-should-have-a-single-moms-ministry.html>.

<sup>119</sup> T B. Maston and William M. Tillman, *The Bible and Family Relations* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1983), 127.

fund which can assist with the reduction of monthly food costs. Most churches provide financial assistance for needy people, and they may be glad to help you.”<sup>120</sup> Even after a time of emergency, support for single-families should continue as simply offering a one-time class will not be enough. Single parents need to continue to gather with all generations in worship in order to share in all of the periods of life such as toddler, pre-teen, teen, and young adults.<sup>121</sup> The bottom line is that by supporting single-families in times of intergenerational worship, there will be time for more biblical wisdom and education to be passed on. These times will hopefully add to the,

relatively few biblical studies that exist concerning single adults...Both the Old and New Testaments stand as testimonials to the relationship of theology and ethics concerning ministry to widows. This particular segment of a church’s membership may be the most overlooked of all in its ministries. More attention needs to be given to how single adults, widowed, divorced, and never married members can be ministered to and in turn can minister in and through the church to others in need.<sup>122</sup>

Following this, one needs to consider how single-parent families can serve across generational lines through a lifestyle of worship as demonstrated by the model of Ezra. By serving one another single parents can find biblical help from others within the congregation that can help fulfill roles that are left vacant by missing fathers or mothers. There is no better place to see this example than in the Gospels where,

Jesus applied familial language to his followers: “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt. 12:49–50). Acts describes the early church sharing with a generosity that would put many actual families to shame. The Epistles address their hearers as brothers and sisters. Paul sends greetings to the mother of Rufus “who has been a mother to me too” (Rom.

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<sup>120</sup> Richmond, 77.

<sup>121</sup> Jennifer Magio, “5 Reasons Your Church Should Have a Single Moms Ministry,” crosswalk, March 27, 2012, <https://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/jennifer-maggio/5-reasons-your-church-should-have-a-single-moms-ministry.html>, 1.

<sup>122</sup>T B. Maston and William M. Tillman, 128.

16:13). He instructs Timothy to relate to older members of his church as spiritual parents, to younger members as siblings (1 Tim. 5:1–2).<sup>123</sup>

The idea of serving the family of God as one big family is rooted in stories like that of Ezra and how he desperately sought out the genealogies of the returning exiles in order to purify worship and restore biblical values to the nation. The New Testament writers, “understood the church to mirror the nuclear family: father, mother, brother, sister. Because of their controversial faith, first-century believers could not rely on natural family relationships. The church became their spiritual family. Like at home, both fathers and mothers played a pivotal role in the well-being of that family.”<sup>124</sup> It is also worth remembering that, “the typical church leadership structure boasts plenty of church fathers. But we can’t forget the significance of church mothers, lest the church risk functioning as a single-parent family.”<sup>125</sup> No matter what role the church will need to serve in for the single-parent family, Christians should be willing to fulfill this godly calling to service those God has brought into their lives. According to this calling,

Christian parenting is a task for the entire church. It is a responsibility even for those who have never conceived or legally adopted a child. I am not disputing the primacy of the biological or adopted parents. Tradition and, increasingly, contemporary science show that children flourish when one or two particular adults consistently nurture them. But, as I have argued throughout the pages of this book, Christian parents are agents of the church. And they are engaged in a task too big and important for them alone. Single Christians should not be exempt from either the joys or the responsibilities that children bring. Singles are significant role models. In a transit society where many children are separated from biological relatives by hundreds of miles, singles conserve invaluable a

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<sup>123</sup> Jen Wilkin, “The Church Is Not a Single-Parent Family,” *Christianity Today*, November 23, 2016, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/december/church-is-not-single-parent-family.html>, 1.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

surrogate grandparents or aunts and uncles. In service most important, of course, to the parent without a spouse.<sup>126</sup>

If this calling is clearly stated both within scripture and within the texts that are studied, it is important to have ministries focused on intergenerational service as an act of worship. During the time of Ezra, family lineage was important, and the kinsmen redeemer mentioned in the story of Ruth was about responsibility for helping those who were widowed, which would have been one of the stories Ezra passed down to all generations. Unfortunately, the church today is suffering from a lack of intergenerational servants who will fulfill this kind of calling.<sup>127</sup> Pastors also fail to stress the importance of single parents because, “they do not give single-parent family ministry affirmation from the pulpit. If the pastor will not affirm it, throw his enthusiastic support behind it, and help recruit workers then the congregation will not either.”<sup>128</sup> Another reason that so few have volunteered for such ministries is due to the fact that, “most married lay-people won’t get involved in the ministry once it has started. Too often churches will provide a room, schedule a time, and then invite single parents to do their own thing. Sometimes a staff person is charged with oversight, but the bottom line is that single parents are left to minister to single parents.”<sup>129</sup> This is a recipe for disaster because without pastoral support and intergenerational involvement, the church will be in danger of continuing in age-segregated worship.<sup>130</sup> As the congregation is made more aware of this need, the single parent should also be aware of the need for their children to have godly influences

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<sup>126</sup> Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional and Modern Options* (Downers Grove, Ill., USA: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 107.

<sup>127</sup> Fruge,3.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.,3.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.,3.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.,3.



from all generations represented in their lives. Single parents and any Christian family for that matter, would be wise to seek out, godly men and women of all ages to come alongside of their children and serve them through times of discipleship. This is more pronounced in the single-parent family, however, due to a lack of a godly mother and father in the home. The Church can serve to fill this gap and the single families' children will be able, "to hear about values and truths from other adults besides you. Furthermore, they need to see how others are living out their faith and need to dialogue with different people about biblical truths. Sunday school, youth group, and other church activities should be required, not optional."<sup>131</sup>

It is also important to let single parents fulfill the role of a godly mother or godly father to others who are single parents as well. The concept that only a two-parent couple can accomplish this must be dispelled, and the Church should stop grouping single parents all into one category. The congregation should always take the time to understand what types of single parents are within their church because, "single-families come about through the following ways: Single mother/father by divorce, single mother/father by being widowed, single mother/father by child out of wedlock, and single mother/father by adoption. The local church needs to be equipped to address these areas of being a single-parent family without assuming or grouping all of them together."<sup>132</sup> By allowing times of intergenerational worship through service the church should become more unified with

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<sup>131</sup> National Center for Biblical Parenting. "Single-Parenting," National Center for Biblical Parenting, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.biblicalparenting.org/pr-singleparenting.asp>.

<sup>132</sup> Table for One Ministries. "The Joys of Being a Parent," Table for One Ministries, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://tfoministries.org/christian-single-parents/>.

the help of the Holy Spirit and begin to grow spiritually in ways that only the Lord knows.

This leads to the final area that the intergenerational model of Ezra can have on single-parent families which is the area of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is all a part of the sanctification process and, “In our divorce culture, the idea of family is more important than ever. Building healthy, strong, and secure family churches means inviting every age to participate.”<sup>133</sup> The greatest comfort that single parents can have is the knowledge that Jesus has a special tenderness in his heart for children as seen in Matthew 19:14. Jesus desires to disciple the children of single-parent homes just as much as he does the children of two-parent homes. By demonstrating purity, honor, and honesty single-parent families can earn the respect that will mold their children to demonstrate godly behavior. Comfort should also come in the form of God’s grace that will help solidify any areas of spiritual growth that are needed within their children.<sup>134</sup> This can be seen in Psalms 27:10 which states, “though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.” With the knowledge that Jesus is the one who ultimately fulfills the role of the missing parent, it is still important for the church to come along side single parents and help disciple them and their children for the glory of God.

One way this can be accomplished is by creating and implementing intergenerational times of not only worship, but discipleship that can be used to edify and spiritually grow all those who are involved. A program such as this, “shouldn’t be

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<sup>133</sup> Parsley,92.

<sup>134</sup> Got Questions Ministries. “What Does the Bible Say About Single Parents/Parenting?,” Got Questions, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.gotquestions.org/single-parenting.html>.

primarily a social group, as important as fellowship is. Its first function should be to draw you and the others closer to Christ. When that happens there will be laughter, tears, healing and then the ability to move on with your life.”<sup>135</sup> During these times of intergenerational spiritual growth there should be a considerable amount of prayer. One single parent has stated that, “We need intercession and would love to have a leader pray over us and our kids on a regular basis. This will also teach us how to pray at home.”<sup>136</sup> Following these times of prayer one can begin to mentor others in the group as well as be mentored. When asked what this kind of mentoring would mean for a single parent the parent stated her desire for Christians to, “Show our kids that they are not forgotten or ‘less than.’ Spend time listening to them, affirming them one-on-one about their strengths and gifts, and help them work through the hurt, anger, fear and rejection they’re dealing with.”<sup>137</sup> Through these times of mentorship it is vital to remember that it must be founded on the Bible alone. By establishing a biblical foundation many strengths will come through the power of the Holy Spirit speaking through the words of God. This kind of foundation,

will provide enormous strength and staying power for the leaders and workers in single-parent family ministry. There are lots of good-hearted individuals who want to do something because they see that single-parent families need help, but they do not take time to make a biblical case to their church for meeting the need. Before you begin, do your homework. Pray for direction by the Holy Spirit and delve into the Word. I hear what you’re asking: You mean the Bible actually talks about single parents? Yes! Just open and begin reading!<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Richmond, 74.

<sup>136</sup> Single-Parent Missions. “Top 10 Ministry Needs of Single-Parents,” Ministry to Single-Parent Families, accessed January 25, 2020, <http://singleparentmissions.com/ministry-to-single-parent-families/>.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Fruge, 3.

This realm of thinking mirrors perfectly how Ezra studied, taught, and enacted the Word of God.

Through these times of Biblical study, tough issues can begin to be tackled that would otherwise possibly be avoided. Issues such as divorce and abuse can be discussed and used as time of edification for the congregation and healing for those single-parent families that need healing. Wise counsel can also be found in regard to biblical dating. Some, “Single parents of different ages react differently to the idea of dating, but as long as your relationship with God is guiding your path you will know if dating is right for you during this season of your life.”<sup>139</sup> Through this time of intergenerational worship through discipleship one can also glean wisdom for those that are trying to impart biblical wisdom to their children who might have bad influences elsewhere in their lives. One in this situation should, “Never underestimate the power of your influence on your child. Your convictions and your relationship go a long way to help your child be prepared for life and wise choices along the way.”<sup>140</sup> It is also important to remember that ‘a single moms' ministry IS NOT the same thing as a singles' ministry. Single moms need a place to connect that is gender-exclusive, where they can share the real-life concerns they carry when parenting alone.’<sup>141</sup> It should bring a single parent comfort to know that, “many single parents and psychologists agree that growing up in a single-parent household will not ruin a child’s life. The stronger and more positive the custodial parent, the greater the

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<sup>139</sup> Table for One Ministries, 1.

<sup>140</sup> National Center for Biblical Parenting. “Single-Parenting,” National Center for Biblical Parenting, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://www.biblicalpharenting.org/pr-singleparenting.asp>.

<sup>141</sup> Jennifer Magio, “5 Reasons Your Church Should Have a Single Moms Ministry,” crosswalk, March 27, 2012, <https://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/jennifer-maggio/5-reasons-your-church-should-have-a-single-moms-ministry.html>.

likelihood that the child will grow through the development stages...”<sup>142</sup> That’s why it is so crucial to have some form of a Christian leader whether it be mother or father present in the child’s life. For Christians looking to be involved in ministries such as these, they should strive to,

make sure the groups primary focus is on the Lord Jesus Christ and that his Word is believed without apology. Be concerned if there is not a healthy balance between Christian psychology and scripture. When the two disciplines are in conflict, side with the Word of God. Psychology is a young and sometimes helpful field, but it is in no position to debate or replace a strong and personal faith.<sup>143</sup>

A few signs that this kind of Christian intergenerational discipleship group for single parents is being effective is to see if they are accepting, willing to give guidance, speak the truth in love, offer protection and strength when needed, offer advice in the faith that Jesus alone is the ultimate authority, and that they are willing to help financially in practical biblical ways if needed. If these signs are present, then one should be willing and eager to be involved for the glory of God and for the sake of true intergenerational discipleship.<sup>144</sup>

### **Conclusion**

After reviewing the literature, an intergenerational model of worship based on the ministry of Ezra comes into focus. There are three focal points that anchor this model and they include studying, teaching, and enacting God’s word. Through these three key

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<sup>142</sup> Cathleen Getty, *Understanding the Family: Stress and Change in American Family Life* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1981), 64.

<sup>143</sup> Richmond, 73.

<sup>144</sup> Shannon DeGarmo, “7 Scripture Verses for the Single-Parenting Journey,” crosswalk, September 12, 2019, <https://www.crosswalk.com/family/parenting/single-parents/7-scripture-verses-for-the-single-parenting-journey.html>.

anchor points, one begins to connect them to each other through the various literatures that support each one. First, when considering studying God's word, the literature shows the importance of the role of the family, family devotions, private devotions, personal application, and life change that were all apart of Ezra's ministry. Second, when looking at the literature on how Ezra taught God's word it is observed that he did so through times of mentoring, listening to God, choosing the right location, promoting corporate worship across generational lines, and balancing times of praise with times of sorrow. Third, the literature supported the idea that Ezra enacted the Word by reading, praying, balancing, passing, and adjusting his ministry in order to serve all generations at the same time. Finally, the research showed how a sub-group, like single-parent families, can be impacted by such a model of intergenerational worship. The literature constructed four methods that work within the model of Ezra such as inclusion, support, intergenerational service, and spiritual growth. Ezra's model for intergenerational worship, based on the literature, can now be analyzed for practical ways that it can be applied to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Church. It can also be used to see practical ways that the Church can minister to single-parent families, but first the methodology of the study needs to be examined.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The qualitative historical research design was used to identify and expound upon the elements of the ministry of Ezra that can be used as a model for integrational worship.

Creswell states,

Writing a method section for a proposal or study for qualitative research partly requires educating readers as to the intent of qualitative research, mentioning specific designs, carefully reflecting on the role the researcher plays in the study, drawing from an ever-expanding list of types of Literature sources, using specific protocols for recording Literature, analyzing the information through multiple steps of analysis, and mentioning approaches for documenting the methodological integrity or accuracy—or validity—of the Literature collected.<sup>145</sup>

It is clear that this research design is the best one to follow when striving to look at how a historical biblical figure like Ezra ministered to all generations with an application to single-parent families as well. The collected literature found on both Ezra and single parents can be verified as accurate as they all originated from academic library resources found on the Liberty University Library sites, or through the texts collected from the Clear Creek Baptist Bible College Library. According to Creswell, “Interpretation in qualitative research involves several procedures: summarizing the overall findings, comparing the findings to the literature...,and stating limitations and future research ”<sup>146</sup> All of these methods were used throughout this study, from the summary of Ezra’s ministry to the recommended studies for future research on single-parent families and beyond. The aim of this historical research, “is to help your reader understand the significance of past events and not merely regard these events as an un-connected series

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<sup>145</sup> John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018), 179.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

of facts.”<sup>147</sup> The series of facts seen in the literature testifies to the idea that Ezra’s ministry connects to a helpful model for the 21st-century Church to follow. Second, it was determined that only public documents would be used as no private documents are known about Ezra. With these two guiding principles all of the sources and literature within the research were selected based off of their academic credentials and reliability on God’s Word.

The next step in the qualitative process involved using the document analyzation ideas found in table 9.3 in the Creswell text.<sup>148</sup> Throughout the research process a research journal was kept that provided space for notes on the four areas of Ezra’s ministry. These four areas include Ezra’s background, methods of study, methods of teaching, and methods of enacting God’s Word. By placing each source into one of these four categories it was very convenient to develop the various sections of the research. While using commentaries, scripture, and other academic articles and theses, the research was able to flow onto the page with ease and be presented in each section clearly. The fourth and final area that the literature was divided into was how Ezra enacted the Word of God. Here the literature began to look at the effects of the ministry of Ezra and how his work went beyond teaching about worship to the realm of demonstrating and developing ways to preserve biblical worship. If any of the literature did not fit in any one of these four categories, it was removed entirely or removed to be used in a later chapter.

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<sup>147</sup> Bill Mcdowell, *Historical Research: A Guide for Writer of Dissertations, Thesis, Articles and Books* (London: Routledge, 202), 1, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4324/9781315841601>.

<sup>148</sup> Creswell, 189.



In order to address the benefits of an intergenerational model and address the single-parent families within the Body of Christ, the following research questions were examined:

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: In what ways did Ezra teach worship across generational lines?

RQ2: In what ways can the intergenerational worship model of Ezra impact single-parent families in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Church?

### **Hypotheses**

H1: Ezra taught worship across generational lines by studying what God preferred in worship, by teaching out of self-sacrifice, and enacting the Word through mentoring others despite generational lines.

H2: Single-parent families in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Church are impacted by the intergenerational worship model of Ezra specifically in terms of how the model encourages the Church to embrace single-parent families through inclusion, congregational support, opportunities to serve all generations, and spiritual growth.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of research that was gathered in an effort to examine how the ministry of Ezra may provide a model for intergenerational worship within the Church. The first research question and hypothesis was addressed by laying out the model of intergenerational worship that one might follow to enhance intergenerational worship. The second research question and hypothesis was addressed through the sources that explain the ways in which the 21st-century Church can engage with single parents in order to encourage greater intergenerational worship. These research findings were unpacked and discussed thoroughly using the biblical example of Ezra as a guide.

### Ways to Study God's Word

To begin it is important to look back at the genealogy found in Ezra 7:1-5 which demonstrates a long line of servants to the most-high God. Coming from a line of high priests, Ezra would have had many times of worship with his family. His family would have taught him strictly based on their memory due to the fact that the temple no longer existed. Through this he saw what worked and what did not. The research indicated that Ezra and the returning exiles understood what had happened to their ancestors in the realm of idol worship and as a result they wanted to correct this tragedy of idol worship by worshipping God in the prescribed way. As a result, "Parents in ancient Israel were also charged with making sure their kids learned their culture, which included learning the truths about God and Israel."<sup>149</sup> The same should be true for Christians today in respect to

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<sup>149</sup> Keith Getty and Kristyn Getty, *Sing! How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, and Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H publishing group, 2017), 55

how often families gather for worship in order to study and learn God's truth. If it was important for the development of Ezra in preparation for restoring intergenerational ministry, then it should be important for families today who desire to pass on intergenerational worship as well.

Like Ezra all Christians need to spend time alone in the Word of God in order to hear from Him regarding their worship. With this in mind it is important for every Christian to remember that, "God is the one who initiates worship, He reveals himself to us and we respond accordingly...I believe there are three things we can do to respond to God as private worshipers: 1. Make ourselves increasingly present to God. 2. Set aside time regularly for private worship. 3. Offer ourselves completely to God."<sup>150</sup> Looking back throughout Hebrew history, the Jews would spend countless hours praying to God in private. All one needs to do is look at the story of Daniel as an example of a godly individual who prayed privately in order to prepare himself for what was to come publicly. In Daniel 6:10 it states, "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." In the case of Ezra, after reading through his genealogies provided in the literature above, one can see a faithful line of Israelites who demonstrated the need for these times of private devotion. From Ezra's ministry, a model for private devotions can be gleaned. This model includes times of reading the law, prayer, and fasting as demonstrated by Daniel. A connection is seen when

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<sup>150</sup> Rory Noland, *The Worshiping Artist: Equipping You and Your Ministry Team to Lead Others in Worship*, annotated ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), 23.

Ezra is depicted as a great scholar who was still studying in Babylonia under Baruch Ben Neriah, the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah, when Daniel and his companions left for Palestine. So serious was he in his study of the Torah that he regarded it as of even greater importance than the task of rebuilding the Temple, so that he waited until after his teacher's death before he decided to go to Jerusalem with his fellow exiles in order to re-build the Temple.<sup>151</sup>

One can see that Ezra would have studied more as a priest than a prophet. This demonstrates that he would intercede for others during his private times of devotions. He would have also studied the biblical law of how to offer gifts and sacrifices for himself and others. The text goes on to say that this would mean that he was compassionate for those who were ignorant of the law. Taking all of this in context, Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should strive to have private devotions that carefully study God's word in order to intercede for themselves and others, while also having a compassionate heart for those who are lost or are ignorant of biblical God honoring worship.

All of the God-fearing Israelites in the old testament would have had the law memorized or written on their heart due to the wisdom and devotion of their parents. Unfortunately, by the time of Ezra, most of the families who were now living in exile would no longer pass on what they had learned due to impure marriages and neglecting the Jewish holy days which would have been the primary source of private family devotions, as commanded in the book of Leviticus. The neglect of instructing the next generation in these forms of worship is what the prophet Jeremiah credits with being the downfall of the Jewish people which resulted in their exile.<sup>152</sup> This, among other reasons, was why Ezra found it so important to purify the Israelite blood line in order to restore

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<sup>151</sup> Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Ezra." *Vetus Testamentum* 43, no. 2 (1993): 190-214. doi:10.2307/1519352.

<sup>152</sup> Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 111.

biblical knowledge of worshiping God. As the research shows synagogues began to become the norm across the nations during the time of Ezra. Through these synagogues families would have learned how to impart Biblical knowledge to their children within their homes. One needs to look no further than how each family would have observed the feast and festivals according to the law of Moses. Feasts and festivals were when “The worship of devout believers was to be characterized by praise and thanksgiving at all times (Ps. 33:1; cf. Eph 5:19-20). Accordingly, the law scheduled worship for different hours of the day, days of the week, months and seasons of the year, and years of the Jubilee period. The Lord of eternity created time so that all his works could fulfill his plan in the seasons and sequences of this life.”<sup>153</sup> Gleaning from this knowledge, the 21st-century Church should observe the same practice of family devotionals that focus on intergenerational worship, both privately and corporately, throughout the year. When this is done all members of the family should be edified spiritually and able to share how their personal generation worship the Lord in spirit and truth. Times of devotion such as this can be filled with singing, reading scripture, praying, and personal testimony. The point being to pass on a Godly family inheritance of intergenerational worship much like that of the people of Ezra’s time. During the times of singing the family should encourage all forms of musical style from hymns to contemporary songs. In order to be truly intergenerational, all generations must participate/interact with one another. Therefore, this is an important point. All generations should sing together, rather than merely

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<sup>153</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 223.

listening to one another. This will allow times of intergenerational worship to become a normal occurrence not only in the home, but also within the church itself.

With this in mind the duties of reading scripture should also be shared across generational lines by allowing grandparents, parents, siblings, and even guests to take turns reading scripture in whichever translation they choose. In the realm of prayer, the father, which is the biblical spiritual leader of the family, should always begin and set the parameters for this time of intergenerational worship through prayer. This may take the form of what is described as popcorn prayer in which one person begins and then others can pray as led by the Holy Spirit, with the father concluding the time of prayer. Family devotions should also include a time of personal testimonies. During this time no matter how young or old everyone would be welcome to share how God is leading them to worship him in spirit and truth. If this were to take hold, the family could then demonstrate what they have learned about intergenerational worship with their church family.

Ezra would have personally applied the Word of God to his ministry. First, he would have clearly understood that there is no substitution for careful study. Ezra would have devoted much of his life to studying the books of the law particularly the book of Deuteronomy as it is known today. Ezra could also be described as a

secretary, in the law of Moses. The title secretary for Ezra might have a double meaning. In the first place it refers to a Persian official. Ezra was appointed by our Artaxerxes for the specific task of acting as a secretary in Judah on behalf of the religious institutions. He was also a priest, however, who had made a special study of the law of Moses, the legal parts of the Pentateuch. He was therefore able to interpret the law for the Jewish community. Some scholars hold that Ezra as a scribe and learn man in the law was the compiler and final editor of the law. But there is little in Ezra if anything to prove or surmise this point. It's much better,

and true to these books, to except that Ezra must be regarded as the founder of Jewish exegesis on the method of the midrash halakha.<sup>154</sup>

Like a secretary today, Ezra would have been meticulous about the points of the law and taken extreme care to organize and document it in such a way that the people could clearly understand. Second, Ezra understood that study is not merely for the sake of knowledge, but must translate into personal application. This devotion to applying what he studied to life was contagious and as a result,

The favor of God was with him because he had set his heart on the study of the law... Ezra thus consecrated his whole life on the study of the law. But it is not only a question of study—he also practiced the law. It was not a dead letter, but a living reality to him (cf. also Jas. 1:22). To teach Israel. This phrase refers to the fulfilling of his mission. He taught the Jews the law in Babylon and now he had come to Judah to do likewise... the emphasis is not laid on the practicing of the law, but on the teaching.<sup>155</sup>

Scripture should be used to change our lives, thoughts, attitude, and actions. Ezra had the monumental task of making sure he and the people were willing to change their lives, thoughts, attitudes, and actions with the help of the Holy Spirit. Christians in the 21st-century Church would be wise to have the same heart as Ezra, in regard to how one handles one's personal application of scripture and how it can impact others. The importance of this kind of heart cannot be understated and might be difficult just like it was for Ezra, but "you must challenge people to do it and encourage them to greater sacrifice. Share stories about an intergenerational family in your messages. Teach the ideas of family, love, and generational value in Sunday school class, small group, or the Sunday morning message."<sup>156</sup> The second half of life change must lead one to take action

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<sup>154</sup> Fensham, 99.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>156</sup> Ross Parsley, *Messy Church: A Multigenerational Mission for God's Family* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 200.

that will most likely take the form of communicating the lessons one has learned in private devotionals to others around them. When life change has truly occurred, a believer in Christ should be more than willing to share and instruct others in biblical forms of intergenerational worship that can be passed on from generation to generation for years to come. With this in mind, one will “need to be careful not to criticize worship styles that we don’t understand or that may not be part of our experience. Our criticism may keep us from being fruitful in our own worship and hinder God’s plan for our lives.”<sup>157</sup> Having a heart for intergenerational worship like this, will help Christians be molded in the image of God and be willing to show others how to do the same.

### **Ways to Teach God’s Word**

The 21st-century Church should model Ezra’s example of mentoring, listening, worshipping together, while also finding a balance of praise and sorrow. This portion of the model begins by looking at how the 21st-century Church should mentor all generations on how to worship intergenerationally. As seen in the research, one of Ezra’s most important ministries was that of a scribe.<sup>158</sup> The scribe was defined as someone who composes, copies, transmits, and explains intergenerational worship. In today’s terminology, this means that the Church should be active in composing not only music that reaches across generational lines, but also in using biblical translations that can reach across generational lines. This can take the form of allowing younger generations to hear older translations while also having older generations hear younger translations being

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<sup>157</sup> David M. Edwards, *Worship Three Sixty-five: The Power of a Worshipping Life* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 159.

<sup>158</sup> Nykolaishen, 81.



read. A Family Sunday would be an excellent way to implement this point. A Family Sunday is

where you invite every member of the family to attend the services together and shape the services accordingly. You can invite the youth team to lead one Sunday, but then follow up the next month with the hymn sing, complete with the stories of each hymn writer. In the case of a church with two different demographic services, change one element every other week for several months until both services look similar. Then, merge them together as you cast vision about where you're going.<sup>159</sup>

The second lesson to be gleaned from the idea of a scribe is the importance of copying biblical forms of teaching to all generations. Some helpful ideas could be to simply combine Sunday school or life group classes with different ages to see how each generation teaches God's Word. Once this is done each generation can then glean which methods are best from all generations, which will result in a very practical example of intergenerational teaching. The third lesson to be gleaned is to transmit these lessons being copied in Sunday school classes to the church as a whole. Finally, if the model of the scribe is successfully followed, there should be a greater chance of explaining intergenerational worship to all members of the Church, both in and out of the teaching setting.

Ezra spent years reading and listening to God's Word. Ezra would have been extremely familiar with the words of the prophets, and the law of Moses. Along the lines of intergenerational worship, the 21<sup>st</sup>-century church needs to renew its passion for prayerful meditation over God's Word. This form of worship through

biblical meditation is an antidote to the unprecedented stress of our age...there are many references to meditation, pondering, and thinking in the Bible, encouraging us to engage our thoughts with His Word. In fact, the words meditate, and meditation occur 21 times in the Bible; the words think, thinking, and thoughts,

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.,199.

252 times. Mine is mentioned 163 times, and the word ponder is found nine times. Gods approach to mindfulness is to have a mind full of His Word.<sup>160</sup>

Ezra also had to learn how to listen to God's Word while working with ungodly governments. The research indicates that God softened the ruling kings' hearts, in order for Ezra to go back to Jerusalem, the biblical location where God's Word was to be proclaimed. The lesson for the 21st-century Church should resemble Ezra's trust in the Lord and how He can work even through corrupt governments. Romans 13:1-7 states,

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

As a result of the power of God not only working in the hearts of the governments, but also in the heart of Ezra, he (Ezra) was able to pick the best location possible for teaching God's Word which was the Water Gate. It would prove to be the best possible location for instructing the returning exiles in biblical intergenerational worship. The Water Gate, was significant because it did not divide any of the individuals present into groups like the temple would have done. Therefore, males and females of all generations

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<sup>160</sup> Robert J. Morgan, *Reclaiming the Lost Art of Biblical Meditation: Find True Peace in Jesus* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2017), vii.

would be able to be present and hear God's Word clearly in one accord. In applying this concept to today's Church, leadership should also take care to find appropriate locations to have times of intergenerational worship with all generations present. One practical example of this could be to have services outside, in a gym, in a fellowship hall, or out in the community where all generations are given opportunities to not only listen and hear God's Word, but also apply it in creative ways. Sometimes the need for a location outside of the worship center could be due to the creativity of certain generations that would like to demonstrate forms of worship that may not be conducive to an indoor worship setting. This is where the wisdom of pastors should follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, much like Ezra did when picking his location for intergenerational worship.

Finally, after a location for intergenerational worship is found it is important for the Church to stand together through times of persecution that will undoubtedly come, just like the times of persecution that Ezra and Nehemiah had to endure from the non-Jewish locals. Nehemiah 4:15-18 describes this event when it states,

When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work. From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows, and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked.

Worshiping together involves having leadership that is wise and faithful to train individuals to respect and honor the past while also communicating the love of Christ through forms and styles that are used today.<sup>161</sup> Ezra accomplished this by speaking

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<sup>161</sup> Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2008), 193.

God's Word to all generations at once. The 21st-century Church needs to allow all generations the opportunity to speak God's Word as often as possible. Ezra's generation was limited due to the fact that the majority of worshipers in attendance could not read the Word of God on their own. In today's society, the majority of generations can now clearly read and understand the Gospel and should be encouraged to read it aloud as much as possible, regardless of generation. After Ezra read the Word of God the people provided forms of worship that the church would be wise to follow today.

The first form provided by the literature that supports this model includes listening, standing, lifting hands, shouting, and bowing together. Listening together is the first natural step in this model as it is an extension of the role Ezra played in sharing God's Word. Now as a result of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross, it is possible for each Christian individual, no matter their age, to be able to read God's Word aloud at their pleasure. By taking advantage of this opportunity, the Church should relish the chance to hear God's Word be read from Christian children to Christian grandparents. Many churches today, have also adopted the practice of standing together during the reading of God's Word, which is a tradition that goes back to not only the time of Ezra, but beyond. Nehemiah 9:2-4 describes one of these times when it observes that, "those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God."

Not only did they stand in worship; they also lifted their hands in praise. By lifting their hands, they signified their total surrender to the Law of God. Then, as the

priest saw that the people had risen to their feet in impulsive worship, he began to praise God. Then the people begin to express their own praise with uplifted hands. Ezra didn't tell them to. He didn't say, 'OK, your turn.' He simply proclaimed the greatness of God. The people, then, also aware of God's greatness, impulsively responded to him by lifting up their hands and surrender.<sup>162</sup>

Today, the Church should do the same since we have the fulfilled Law through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Intergenerational worship should lead to times of impulsive adoration of God. They also shouted together by saying Amen, just as it is described in Ezra where he, "passionately broadcast the preeminence of Almighty Yahweh, God's people were making a concerted pronouncement, for all the nations to see and hear; 'we agree.' And notice that it was a double amen. That was like saying, 'we really, really agree'."<sup>163</sup> Being in agreement with the Bible as the holy, inspired, and infallible Word of God should be the foundation of every amen that is stated in the Church today. Ezra, fully understanding the law, knew the value that type of agreement through worship had and how

the Israelites were commanded to say amen repeatedly during the catechism of the curses of the law. The word amen was also used (1) to close several of the Psalms; (2) by Jesus, including the Lord's prayer in Matthew 16:13; (3) in many of the doxologies found in the book of Romans; (4) at the conclusion of each epistle penned by the apostle Paul; and (5) at the very end of the Bible, in Revelation 22:21.<sup>164</sup>

The Church would be wise to have a desire for all of these methods and to utilize them through times of teaching on the expression itself. Bowing together, which the exiles did regularly in reverence and honor to God, is yet another step that the Church can follow, and it should also consider if "maybe it's time for us to re-institute this practice: standing; lifting our hands; bowing; and shouting, 'amen' —together. This historic worship, led by

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<sup>162</sup> Whaley, 143.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 144.

Ezra, was rich, expressive, and maybe even more complete as the people praised God together.”<sup>165</sup>

The final area that was mentioned in the literature is the need for a balance of sorrow and praise. One example of this is when Ezra saw the people who had heard God’s Word and witnessed as

they were deeply sorry for their shameful, disobedient, adulterous history. Tears of joy or sorrow often accompany honest confession of sin and repentance. Such was the case on this day in Israel’s history. As the Word came forth, the people’s hearts were enlightened, and they realized how much they had missed—how much their children had missed—by being separated from God. They wept—bitter tears of grief, but at the same time, tears of joy also.<sup>166</sup>

Throughout Scripture we see both biblical characters and the returning exiles demonstrate how worship can continue despite small distractions that can come as a result of sorrow. Ezra had to teach intergenerational worship with every generation present. This would have included small children, some fragile elderly, and everyone in between. To say that there would have been distractions would have been a major understatement. Babies would have been crying and the elderly would have been standing for multiple hours, as according to Ezra chapter 3. In today’s Church, many are easily distracted by simple melodies and lighting changes. This may be remedied by a refreshing look at how Ezra led worship through all types of emotions and distractions that were present. With this in mind, it is important to strive to avoid unnecessary distractions. If this truth of a balance between praise and sorrow is truly understood biblically, then small examples of emotional and/or unavoidable distractions can be overlooked and even welcomed as a part of worship. For example, if someone has just experienced a time of lament or sorrow

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 144.

in his or her life, there should be times of prayer that are presented to the congregation in order to cry with those who are crying. This is seen in Romans 12:14-16 which states, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” At the same time, the Church must also have times to rejoice with those who are rejoicing. Ezra 3 talks about how these two types of biblical worship were occurring at the same time and how no one could distinguish between the two sounds. Ezra 3:11-13 states,

With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: ‘He is good; his love toward Israel endures forever.’ And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.

It would be wise for the 21st-century Church to think through various methods of how to incorporate a balance of sorrow and praise within their intergenerational worship services in order to have these teachable moments of biblical joy and sorrow. This will help all generations understand what is going on in the lives of their fellow church members and how to best minister to them in a private setting after the service. By teaching these principles of mentoring, listening to God’s Word, selecting the correct location, worshiping together, as well as finding a balance of sorrow and praise one can then take the lessons he or she have been taught and begin to enact them.

### **Ways to Enact God’s Word**

Not only did Ezra study and teach God’s Word, but he also took steps to make sure that the people would enact what they were being taught. The Church today must

also be cognizant of enacting God's Word in an ever-changing society. The first step to this was identified in the literature when talking about the importance that Ezra placed on reading God's Word. Most of these lessons can be clearly seen in the model that developed through the synagogue system that lasted well after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This system provides,

an outline of a typical synagogue liturgy (both ancient and modern) follows: Call to worship. The ruler of the synagogue invites a member of the congregation to commence the service with a blessing followed by a cycle of prayers. The cycle of prayers includes the Yotzer, prayers emphasizing the theme of God his creator, and the 'Ahabah', prayers emphasizing God's covenant love for Israel. Next comes the recitation of the Shema. This congregational recitation is both a confession of faith and a benediction and includes Deuteronomy 6:4-9, emphasizing God's oneness, Deuteronomy 11:13-21, emphasizing obedience to God's law, and numbers 15:37-41, emphasizing tassels on garments. The second cycle of prayers occurs when the minister summoned someone from the congregation to lead in the Risa Tatian of the 18 benedictions, prayers ranging over a variety of things including praise and petition. The scripture lessons follow and include reading, translation if necessary, and exposition of a passage from the Torah, one from the profits, and perhaps a selection from the Psalms. Benediction. Often a Psalmic selection. Finally, a Sermon is given based on the Scriptures readings of the day and followed by congregational blessings and amen that were often a Psalmic selection.<sup>167</sup>

Not only did the synagogue system provide an example of how Ezra enacted God's Word, but his ministry also used God's Word to help people understand why they were where they were. The people of Israel had to reassess who they were in relationship with God, much like the Church today should do on a regular basis. They also sought to understand what had happened to them and why God sent them into exile. Regarding the Church today, it must be vigilant to enact God's Word in and out of season when people ask why they are where they are today. By doing so, the Church will clearly be enacting

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<sup>167</sup> Andrew Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise: Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church*. (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Books, 1993), 231.



God's Word just as Ezra did long ago. Ezra also had to enact God's Word to prove that God was more powerful than the gods of foreign nations that had invaded Israel.

Similarly, today's Christians should strive to defend the faith against false gods and ideologies that are trying to take over souls. The Israelites needed to enact the words of Ezra in order to fulfill their biblical role as the chosen people of God, which would bring forth the Messiah. This applies to the Church today because, Christians are preparing the bride of Christ for the return of the Messiah. This idea of marriage is

the best metaphor for union with the living God. Throughout the Bible marriage is seen as God intended it. And so the celebration of the union with the Lord in heaven is revealed to be a marriage supper. Since this is a spiritual union with Christ that will last forever and bring with eternal bliss, the initial celebration of the union will be a time of worship in the purest sense. Accordingly, the Saints will be there clothed with righteousness as they celebrate their complete communion with Christ and honor him with their adoration and obedience.<sup>168</sup>

By enacting God's Word, they were also remembering the promises God made to Abraham and David. One promise in Genesis 18:18-20 states, "Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." Another promise in 2 Samuel 7:11-16 states,

I will also give you rest from all your enemies. The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed

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<sup>168</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 499.

from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.

Finally, by enacting God's Word, Christians should be able to make a clean break with their past, much like the returning exiles did in reinstating godly worship. These renovations to worship that were made by the Israelites also lead to not only the importance of enacting God's Word, but also of praying His scripture.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 encourages all believers to "pray continually". Combining this attitude of prayer with the thought of the synagogue system that was reestablished and firmed up by the ministry of Ezra, one can see how prayer was an essential part of their worship. The Church today should apply this lesson about meditation through prayer by planning scriptures to pray and meditate on, both publicly and privately, in advance. Regardless, "the best meditation doesn't just occur with miscellaneous random verses. It comes from a systematic study of the Word of God...Meditation can be spontaneous, but it can also be methodical. As we meditate on his thoughts, the barren places of our lives begin to flourish."<sup>169</sup>

The literature also showed how music was congregational and collected in order to create some of the first intergenerational hymn books as according to Wilson and Dickson.<sup>170</sup> These songs, mostly made out of Psalms, would have been intended for all generations to sing. While thinking about praying scripture, meditating on scripture, and singing scripture, the 21st-century Church should choose to find creative ways to do the same in order to involve all generations.

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<sup>169</sup> Morgan, 19.

<sup>170</sup> Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music: From Gregorian Chant to Black Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 22.

Finding the balance between encountering God and hearing God is an important point that goes well beyond simply balancing musical styles, but also looks at balancing emotion with theology. The temple which is known for its important symbolism to the life and ministry of Christ can also be used to demonstrate the balance between seeing God and hearing God. It shows how emotion can contribute to seeing God. While the law, or Tora as it was called, can demonstrate hearing God's Word. When enacting an intergenerational model of worship, the Church should always base its worship services on seeing God and hearing His Word. No matter what style of music or form of liturgy is being used, if it is not leading the congregation to see God or hear God, then it should be avoided because, "worship that does not act as the vehicle for the expression of the great plan of salvation history becomes inevitably narcissistic."<sup>171</sup> Not only did Ezra enact balanced worship to avoid this, he also enacted a time of spiritual renewal by seeking the purification of Hebrew marriages. At first glance, the balance of worship and the renewal of Hebrew marriages may not seem to go together; however, as the literature shows, the people were willing and ready to obey God's Word even if it meant leaving their comfort zones of families that would have ultimately hindered their worship. Today Christians should be willing to leave behind any style, liturgy, family, friends, or ungodly influences that would distract them from preparing the future bride of Christ.

One of the best ways to enact Ezra's intergenerational model of worship is to pass it on to future generations. This will mean that the status quo will most likely need to be changed or re-evaluated as often as the Holy Spirit leads to avoid falling into the trap of

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<sup>171</sup> Noel Due, *Created for Worship: From Genesis to Revelation to You* (Glasgow: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 237.

liberalism or legalism. In the book of Ezra, we see that the exiles are returning from a life saturated in liberalism and ungodly beliefs; while the descendants of Ezra fell into legalism as a result of fearing any change that could lead to another exile. This is the stage that Jesus appeared on when the legalism of the Pharisees and Sadducee ruled the day. Isaiah 29:13-14 talks about their hearts of worship when it states, “The Lord says: ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught. Therefore, once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.’” The Church today must be careful not to pass on rules and regulations, but instead pass on a biblical relationship with the Lord. No matter what forms or styles are being used, all generations should yearn to pass on worshiping God in spirit and truth because, “any form that facilitates and encourages worship in spirit and truth by a particular culture is pleasing to God. That implies that no one form can fully express the vastness of God. No given time, culture, or generation can give God the honor he deserves. This understanding keeps first things first. Cultures change, styles change, traditions change, times change. God remains the same.”<sup>172</sup> The final step that Ezra took in enacting God’s Word was to ensure the reestablishment of biblical God-honoring worship, in a way that fit into the culture of the time. The 21st-century Church must also learn from Ezra’s example and be willing to adjust biblical God-honoring worship in ways that can enhance the understanding of the current generation while also honoring the sacrifices and ministries of the past.

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<sup>172</sup> Kauflin, 193.

Ezra's ministry showed how intergenerational worship can help rehabilitate a congregation or group of people whose worship has grown stale or died. In some cases, churches may see the need to reinstitute intergenerational worship if they have decided to divide across generational lines. By making God the focus of worship Christians should be willing to sacrifice their preferences for people to come to know the Lord and grow spiritually as well. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 Paul talks about this willingness by stating,

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

This is the heart of intergenerational worship that has been demonstrated through the ministry of Ezra.

### **Implications for Single-Parent Families**

This study looks at the subgroup of single-parent families and will transition now into how Ezra's ministry can impact their service to others in the Lord in regards to intergenerational worship. Here one will see how Ezra's ministry impacts single-parent families in the realm of inclusion, support, intergenerational service, and spiritual growth. The first area of Ezra's ministry that impacts single-parent families is the area of inclusion within the body of Christ. Ezra demonstrated that all individuals were welcome during the time of the reading of God's word. This notion should encourage the Church today to reach out to all single-parent families within the congregation in order to make sure they feel welcome during times of worship both publicly and privately. The Church should highlight the struggles, challenges, and benefits of a multi-generational,

interactive family ministry and the strength that lies within a group of people who love one another so deeply that they are willing to lay down their lives for each other.<sup>173</sup> In looking at this area of study one must consider how the church can include single-parent families in edifying the congregation on the role of the family, family devotionals, private devotions, personal application, and life change. One form of inclusion would be to add a sermon within a family series that would focus strictly on how single-parent families can raise godly children alongside of sermons on marriage. When creating family devotionals for the congregation, the pastor should also consider how he can include devotions that focus on single-parent families. The same lesson applies to any materials that could also help in a single parents' private devotions. Including single parents in the development of these studies should also help each individual personally apply the lessons of not only Ezra, but how God can minister to all Biblical family groups. Through these times of inclusion in developing devotionals, the congregation and pastors will have the opportunity to change certain aspects of their life in the realm of being better ministers and church members to single-parent families.

It is also important to think about how the Church can include single-parent families in the areas of teaching within the Church. Like Ezra, single-parent families should always feel welcome to come and listen to God's word and never feel shamed for being alone. Paul elaborated on this in 1 Corinthians 7 and in verse 17 he edifies believers to be content when he states, "Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches." Through times of mentoring this lifestyle of not being

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<sup>173</sup> Parsley, 19.

ashamed of one's marital status might be accomplished. Church leadership should also make an effort to find locations where times of inclusion can take place not only in worship, but also for times of fellowship. Intergenerational worship must also be emphasized in the realm of inclusion, in order to avoid separating single-parent families from the other families within the congregation. The congregation should also follow Ezra's example of a balance of praise and sorrow if the single-parent family is a result of a divorce, illegitimate children, or loss of a loved one. This can be demonstrated through times of specific prayer over these situations.

The final area of inclusion should look at how the church can offer opportunities for single-parent families to enact God's word. Allowing a single parent to read God's Word within an intergenerational worship service is an excellent way to include them within the body of Christ. Praying over them, and allowing them to pray over others, in times of sorrow and in praise is also a fantastic way to promote inclusion. Worship Pastors should be very accepting of single-parent families and allow them to be a part of the worship team and should never exclude them simply on the basis of not being married, which will help fulfill 1 Timothy 5:13-15 which states, "they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan." After all of this, the Church can then do the greatest service for single-parent families by passing on a legacy of open mindedness about helping single-parent families raise godly

children. Adjusting any areas or ministries within the church that would look down upon reaching out to single-parent families should be the desire of the 21st-century Church.

Every church ministry should support all of the members, including single-parent families as they study God's Word. In the realm of the role of the family the church should be encouraged to offer sermons or small group classes that discuss how single-parent families can play a significant role in the church family as a whole. As the church promotes the importance of family devotionals, they should also consider how they can support single parents in their efforts to have these times of devotion. If the father is absent or unable to fulfill his role as the spiritual leader of the house, or if the mother is the one absent, then the church should find ways to help fill either void. The same thinking applies to helping them with private devotions that can support them as they attempt to raise children on godly principles. As they come out of these times of devotion both publicly and privately, the church should also support them as they attempt to apply what they have learned to not only themselves, but others for the glory of God. With the help of the Holy Spirit, single-parent families may begin to see life change within themselves, their children, and their church.

Now one can look at role models that various pastors and lay leaders can play in fulfilling this model of support in order to fill the gaps that may be present in a child's life who is without a godly mother or father. As seen in the ministry of Ezra, each of his methods for teaching intergenerational worship revolved around five principles within each section. With this in mind one should think about how five other individuals can come alongside each single parent in order to help teach at least one or more of these principles to their children. One magazine suggests that, "every child needs five adult



fans. Any young person who shows interest in Christ needs a minimum of five people of various ages who will say, I'm going to love that kid until they are fully walking as an adult member of this congregation."<sup>174</sup> These five adults could include, but are not limited to, pastors, worship leaders, youth pastors, children's pastors, and lay leaders.

When thinking about these individuals and how they can support single-parent families by stepping into vacant spiritual leadership roles, it is important to remember that single parents can help fill these voids as well as for other family's children.

Supporting the development of intergenerational worship within the lives of the next generation will take all the effort of every family within the church which includes both two-parent homes and single-parent homes. Some helpful ideas that can be utilized are taking the time to guide, give input, and know the child's hopes and dreams. After this, one could also identify quirks about the child and observe good points that children can make in regard to intergenerational worship. This would also allow for times of honest conversation between youth and seniors about various forms of worship and how they can help and support each other in life and ministry. The senior mentor could offer wisdom and help through the child's development, while also receiving energy from the youth of the child. This would be a great benefit to both generations. Finally, by having five or more godly influences, the child will also learn how to pray and talk with God through various godly mentors across generational lines.<sup>175</sup> Leading children to know the Lord is the ultimate goal of intergenerational worship and it is important to reemphasize

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<sup>174</sup> Chap Clark, "In Spite of How They Act," *Decision*, August 17, 2004, <https://decisionmagazine.com/in-spite-of-how-they-act>.

<sup>175</sup> Carey Nieuwhof, "Why Your Kids Need Five Other Adults in Their Lives," Parent Cue, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://theparentcue.org/why-your-kids-need-five-other-adults-in-their-lives/>.

that “effective ministry to kids requires the investment of Dads, Moms, and those other five-plus adults who reflect the full spectrum of adult-age. And the ministry effectiveness of those adult mentors increasingly depends on just how deep, wide, and mature (*old*, maybe?) in the faith those adults have been taken by those who are ministering to and nurturing them.”<sup>176</sup> By filling these roles the local church will be able to see relationships form between generations and as a result can begin to see how effective models of intergenerational worship like that of Ezra’s can impact all families for the glory of God.

This brings one back to how the Church can support single-parent families in the realm of teaching God’s Word. The church should provide opportunities for mentors to be trained and disciplined so they can go out and help encourage single-parent families. This training is important because, “discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow towards maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well.”<sup>177</sup> As with any Christian, the first step in teaching is to listen to God’s Word and apply it to his or her life. In regard to teaching, single-parent families should be offered the opportunity to both teach classes on being godly single parents, and also be able to teach and attend other classes that can help them learn as well. The location of these classes should be determined on a case by case basis within the church, as some single parents might prefer small home groups, while others might prefer a Sunday school format. Worshiping together is also a positive way to support single-parent

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<sup>176</sup> Walt Mueller, “5 Adults to 1 Kid. but Who Are the 5?,” CPYU, August 13, 2013, <https://cpyu.org/2013/08/13/5-adults-to-1-kid-but-who-are-the-5/>.

<sup>177</sup> Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, expanded ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Connect, 2007), 17.

families. It is important to avoid the notion that because the parent is single, he or she is not able to minister in various capacities because of fear that they are already too overwhelmed. This is where the role of finding balance in times of praise and sorrow can be applied by demonstrating how one can volunteer for any ministry as a single parent.

The church can help single parents enact God's Word by providing them with the various tools and resources that it takes to read God's Word. One idea would be to provide Christian literature and commentaries on the Word of God and how to better read the Word of God. Biblically one of the best ways to support single-parent families is through prayer because, "countless thousands in our communities are wondering and spiritually pondering about things while looking for something real and transforming. Thousands of others are rummaging in the wasteland of dead religion waiting to be pulled into a life-changing encounter with the living Christ through his church. For their sake, we must pursue a new level of prayer and spiritual power."<sup>178</sup> Balanced worship can also uplift single-parent families by allowing them opportunities to demonstrate biblical intergenerational worship to their children. This will in turn lead to passing on the legacy of intergenerational worship. Once the church has completed these elements based on Ezra's ministry, they will be poised to adjust any areas they see that need to be firmed up in the round of single-parent ministry.

The third section looks at how single-parent families can be involved in intergenerational service. The Church needs to understand that "one of the most important trends of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century was the dramatic rise in single-parent

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<sup>178</sup> Daniel Henderson and Margaret Saylor, *Fresh Encounters* (United States: Navpress, 2008), 36.

families through increases in divorce and nonmarital childbearing.”<sup>179</sup> In the realm of studying God’s Word, intergenerational worship will help single-parent families be able to fill gaps that may be present within their family unit. In essence this is a call for church members to become mentors for children who might be without spiritual leadership in the home. For example, the role of grandfather, father, grandmother, mother, aunt, and uncle may not be present within the family unit, but within the church family these roles can be filled by individuals who are willing to encourage and spend time imparting God’s wisdom to single-parent families in times of devotion. Intergenerational service will also help children make a personal application to the idea of having a godly role model that may be able to fill the gap of a missing parent. As a result, both the church member and the family could experience wonderful periods of spiritual growth that may not happen otherwise.

When thinking about teaching God’s Word, intergenerational service can lead all generations to listen to God’s Word together in various translations from all periods of the Church. Finding locations to encourage this type of energy and relational interaction with single families should be well planned and executed by the staff and pastors of the church. During times of intergenerational worship, all the children will be able to see all generations giving glory and honor to God, where they may not see this in a church that keeps the generations separated during times of worship. Within these times of worship

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<sup>179</sup> Arland Thornton. "Framework for Interpreting Long-Term Trends in Values and Beliefs Concerning Single-Parent Families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71, no. 2 (05, 2009): 230-4, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/219749395?accountid=12085>.

intergenerational service can take place by weeping and praising with all generations present regardless of the family blueprint.

This leads to how Christians can help single parents enact the Word of God through intergenerational service. Creating intergenerational worship service that encourages all generations to read God's Word together will provide opportunities for single-parent families to participate in all of the elements of the worship service. While there are no perfect strategies for implementing intergenerational worship that can help bridge the gap of worship language differences, the Church can implement balance, authenticity, and excellence in the methods that are used to better include all generations that would otherwise desire to be separate.<sup>180</sup> When intergenerational worship takes place the reading of God's Word should always take precedent. There should also be times of prayer that are offered in each service that takes place where all family types and generations are encouraged to pray with and over each other. Balanced worship plays a significant role in an effective intergenerational worship service that includes all family types, and offers all generations a time to lay down their personal preferences musically and embrace biblical musical worship and other forms of worship that they might not see in other services focused on one generation alone. The hope of all of this being, to encourage future generations to worship together in spirit and in truth regardless of family types in generation. After multiple worship services that focus on this intergenerational aspect of serving others through our worship of God, then one should be willing to pass on what he or she has learned in order to glorify God. As these types of

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<sup>180</sup> Page, 50.

services and opportunities take place, then the church leadership through the direction of the Holy Spirit can decide what needs to be adjusted.

When thinking about spiritual growth

one thing is clear. It is not the purpose of God that our Christian experience should be static. There lies ahead of us endless possibilities of growth into the likeness of Christ. These words clearly show that Christlikeness in all its fullness is not the result merely of some moment of high and holy exaltation, but that it is a progressive experience. The inward change produced in us by the Holy Spirit is to be daily transforming us more nearly to the image of our Lord. We are transfigured by the renewing of our mind.<sup>181</sup>

Studying God's Word in regard to single-parent families is the ideal area to focus on if one's Church is in need of growing spiritually as it relates to inclusion, support, and service. If the congregation is unsure about the role the family plays in intergenerational worship, then opportunities to come alongside single-parent families should be used to edify them in lifting up members of the body of Christ. This model will also hopefully lead them to develop their own times of family and private devotions. Having times of intergenerational service, may allow for spiritual growth to take place in the realm of personal application and self-sacrifice of preferences in order to give God the glory and provide godly intergenerational wisdom to children who may be without a spiritual leader in the household. If the Lord leads and the Holy Spirit moves, then individuals should notice a significant amount of life change through these times of service and growth.

Rory Noland explains how,

serving others is the ultimate example of worship as a verb. As Hebrews 13:15-16 asserts, 'Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.' One of the Greek words used for worship in the New Testament is *latreuo*, which actually means 'to

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<sup>181</sup> J Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Maturity: Principles of Spiritual Growth for Every Believer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 165.

serve' (see Acts 7:42;24:14; Philippians 3:3). The same word appears as a noun in the phrase spiritual act of worship from Romans 12:1 which is translated elsewhere as spiritual service of worship or reasonable service. Thus, our concept of worship is far too narrow if it doesn't include serving others.<sup>182</sup>

Teaching God's Word would be the next logical step for one to take if they have truly applied and gleaned the lessons from the ministry of Ezra. Teaching requires a mentor who must be willing to constantly go through times of spiritual growth in order to edify themselves, alongside of others, for the glory of God. Hopefully, one would have learned by the example of Ezra how to listen to God's Word with an intergenerational heart and a heart for single-parent families. With this kind of heart Christian individuals should be willing to change locations, worship times, and any other personal preferences in order to help others grow spiritually. In teaching all of these lessons both verbally and physically one should find it more natural to share in times of praise and sorrow with his or her fellow Christians. The importance of being willing to teach these principles cannot be overstated and should be made a priority within every believer's life.

James 1:22-25 states,

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 someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Ezra demonstrated this heart of not only listening to the Word but enacting the Word.

Like Ezra, the individual completing this study on single-parent families should possess the knowledge to read God's Word in a new light with the hope of gleaning wisdom across generational and family lines. Through spiritual growth the body of Christ should

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<sup>182</sup> Noland, 76.

also be edified and encouraged to continually pray with one another regardless of circumstances. Through these times of prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit one should be willing to use a more balanced approach of worship and put his or her preferences aside. By doing so he or she should be able to pass on a legacy of intergenerational worship and a heart for single-parent families that may have not otherwise been present. At the conclusion of it all one can then adjust spiritually what he or she needs to adjust in order to bring God the glory and truly apply the lessons of Ezra's intergenerational model of worship for years and generations to come.

Now one can look at role models that various pastors and lay leaders can play in fulfilling this model in order to fill the gaps that may be present in a child's life who is without a godly mother or father. As seen in the ministry of Ezra, each of his methods for teaching intergenerational worship revolved around five principles within each section. With this in mind one should think about how five other individuals can come alongside each single parent in order to help teach at least one or more of these principles to their children. One magazine suggests that, "every child needs five adult fans. Any young person who shows interest in Christ needs a minimum of five people of various ages who will say, I'm going to love that kid until they are fully walking as an adult member of this congregation."<sup>183</sup> These five adults could include, but are not limited to, pastors, worship leaders, youth pastors, children's pastors, and lay leaders.

When thinking about these individuals and how they can support single-parent families by stepping into vacant spiritual leadership roles, it is important to remember

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<sup>183</sup> Chap Clark, "In Spite of How They Act," *Decision*, August 17, 2004, <https://decisionmagazine.com/in-spite-of-how-they-act>.



that single parents can help fill these voids as well for other family's children. Supporting the development of intergenerational worship within the lives of the next generation will take all the effort of every family within the church which includes both two-parent homes and single-parent homes. Some helpful ideas that can be utilized are taking the time to guide, give input, and know the child's hopes and dreams. After this one could also identify quirks about the child and observe good points that children can make in regard to intergenerational worship. This would also allow for times of talk honest conversation between youth and seniors about various forms of worship and how they can help and support each other in life and ministry. The senior mentor could offer wisdom and help through the child's development, while also receiving energy from the youth of the child. This would be a great benefit to both generations. Finally, by having five or more godly influences, the child will also learn how to pray and talk with God through various godly mentors across generational lines.<sup>184</sup> Leading children to know the Lord is the ultimate goal of intergenerational worship and it is important to reemphasize that "effective ministry to kids requires the investment of Dads, Moms, and those other five-plus adults who reflect the full spectrum of adult-age. And the ministry effectiveness of those adult mentors increasingly depends on just how deep, wide, and mature (*old, maybe?*) in the faith those adults have been taken by those who are ministering to and nurturing them."<sup>185</sup> By filling these roles the local church will be able to see relationships

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<sup>184</sup> Carey Nieuwhof, "Why Your Kids Need Five Other Adults in Their Lives," Parent Cue, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://theparentcue.org/why-your-kids-need-five-other-adults-in-their-lives/>.

<sup>185</sup> Walt Mueller, "5 Adults to 1 Kid. but Who Are the 5?," CPYU, August 13, 2013, <https://cpyu.org/2013/08/13/5-adults-to-1-kid-but-who-are-the-5/>.

form between generations and as a result can begin to see how effective models of intergenerational worship like that of Ezra's can impact all families for the glory of God.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS**

Chapter five summarizes and condenses the study of Ezra's ministry and its impact on intergenerational worship. A brief recapitulation of the findings is also included where all of the findings are organized into practical steps that demonstrate ways the Church can implement more times of intergenerational worship instead of age-segregated worship. This reorganization takes place in what is called Ezra's circle of fifths. Single-parent families are also included in this model. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future studies and research following the example of Ezra's ministry where the circle of fifths remains, but the center of the model changes based on what group is being researched.

### **Summary of the Study**

There is no shortage of intergenerational worship studies and models within the realm of research today. However, there is a shortage of models based on specific biblical characters with the intent of gleaning helpful information about how to encourage times of intergenerational worship within the whole congregation and specifically in the realm of the impact it can have on single-parent families. Therefore, a qualitative historical study was conducted to examine the specific ministry of Ezra. The goal being to create a biblical model of intergenerational worship that can be followed in order to promote more times of intergenerational worship services that can impact not only the whole congregation, but specifically single parents. Multiple sources were gathered and examined in order to develop Ezra's model for intergenerational worship which may help the Church move towards more biblically based intergenerational worship services.

Through this study it was discovered that Ezra taught worship across generational lines by studying, teaching, and enacting the Word. Within each of these three main methods, there were smaller methods that expounded upon them. For the first area of Ezra studying God's Word it was noted that he did so through the role of family, family devotion, private devotion, personal application, and life change. The second main method was teaching God's Word and Ezra demonstrated this by listening to God's Word, picking the right location, worshiping together, and allowing times of praise and sorrow to take place within worship. The third main method was how Ezra enacted the Word. Here one saw that Ezra read God's Word, prayed, encouraged balanced worship, and passed on the legacy of intergenerational worship. After this the study then looked at the specific group of single parents and how Ezra's model of intergenerational worship impacted them as well as the whole congregation. Here information was gathered that showed how single-parent families and churches following this model would be encouraged to include each other in various ministries, support of each other, share in times of intergenerational service, and continue to grow spiritually together.

### **Ezra's Model of Intergenerational Worship**

By following these methods based on the ministry of Ezra, one begins to see a model unfurl. In order to present this model in a clear and creative way, Ezra's intergenerational circle of fifths was created. This twist on the musical circle of fifths can be seen in its entirety in appendix A. The musical circle of fifths is defined as, "The clockwise arrangement of successive keys arranged in order of ascending fifths."<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Lindsey C. Harnsberger, *Essential Dictionary of Music: Definitions, Composers, Theory, Instrument and Vocal Ranges*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Alfred Pub. Co., 1997), 31.

Taking this concept and using it as a visual guide for the intergenerational model of worship, as seen in the ministry of Ezra, should help clarify one's understanding of this model. Instead of notes leading to the next key, the main points of each of the sections will act as the next key signature, or step, that one must take to get to the next in the realm of implementing Ezra's model. Like the musical circle of fifths, each main point has five sub points which leads to the next main point much like the notes of music lead to the next key signature. Once all of the steps are followed, one will find himself or herself back at the beginning of the circle and can start again in a never-ending circle of intergenerational worship methods.

Within this circle specific groups can be studied to show how the intergenerational model of Ezra can impact them. One should note how each key signature continues to move up from no accidentals to multiple accidentals throughout Ezra's model. The first key, represented by the term study, shows how one would begin alone in preparation for teaching intergenerational worship principles. After thorough study, one would then move to the next key which now has one sharp and begin to teach another individual the principles that they have been studying. Once this has been accomplished, the next key shows two sharps which indicates that both individuals will go out and enact what they have studied and been taught in order to pass on Ezra's model of intergenerational worship.

There is also an inner circle that creates the circle of fourths which is used for flat keys. Although the single parent key is in the form of a flat and different from sharps, the same principle applies in the realm of how they can fulfill the circle of fifths and duplicate intergenerational worship principles exactly like a multiparent family. In the

case of a single parent, it is important to observe that even though they may be the lone Christian influencer, or the one flat, this should not hinder them from implementing the lessons of Ezra within the family unit. As observed in this model, the ideas of inclusion, support, intergenerational service, and spiritual growth flow in the same direction as the rest of the model. This demonstrates how single parents can study, teach, and enact intergenerational principles of worship throughout Ezra's circle of fifths.

Although this study focused on single-parent families, one can also use this subcategory to do further research in other categories like missions, women's ministry, children's and youth ministry, pastoral care ministry, and any other demographic represented in the church. If the Church follows Ezra's circle of fifths, it may result in life change that will lead to more intergenerational times of worship that focuses on, "the priority of worship... Not music. God is to be the object of all our human emotions, energy and intellect, and will not tolerate being displaced from his throne by anyone or anything including our approach to worship no matter how well-intentioned."<sup>187</sup> By concluding the circle of fifths, one sees that after adjusting due to the needs of the local congregation in order to promote intergenerational worship, one may need to repeat the circle in order to adjust ever changing methods to a never changing message.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

The following recommendations for future study are encouraged based on the findings from the literature and the flexibility of the model developed:

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<sup>187</sup> Franklin S. Page, *Hungry for Worship: Challenges and Solutions for Today's Church*(Birmingham, Alabama: New Hope Publishers, Gospel-Centered, Mission-Driven, 2014), 28.

1. An in-depth qualitative historical research study based on the biblical story of Hosea. The focus on being a single parent for a time, and how that can impact one's ministry and the roles the Church can play in assisting single parents through reconciliation. This study could include references to how single parents can reconcile their relationships as well as by using a model formed from the research of Hosea.
2. Development of an intergenerational model for worship based on each book of the Bible. This collection could be assembled as a guidebook with practical musical and non-musical forms of worship represented from each book. This study of Ezra in a condensed form could be used as a guide for such a study. If the entirety of scripture is too lofty of a goal, one could consider breaking it up into various studies throughout scripture, like the historical books of the Bible, or the Gospels.
3. A study of the specific benefits of intergenerational worship ministry as exhibited by various models like Ezra's circle of fifths or other models produced by scholarly sources. This study could look at which models work the best and which models need improvement. Interviews and personal studies of various intergenerational worship services would be a great addition to a study such as this.
4. A study on all types of families that are mentioned in the Bible and how they worshiped. This could include information found in this study about single-parent families along with studies and research found throughout scripture. This study could be based on not only single families, but couples, singles, and grandparents

raising children as well. Interviews and personal testimonies could also be used in a study such as this.



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APPENDIX A

