



THE STORY Sermon Study Guide

Week 7: The Exile - God's Judgement, Faithfulness and Restoration

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14 September 2025

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This week we explore one of the most sobering moments in Israel's history: the exile. It's a picture of what happens when people lose their point of reference and drift away from God; when they forget to love Him first and fail to love others well. But it's also a story of hope, pointing forward to a shepherd who would come to gather His people and lead them home.

Read Ezekiel 8:9-18

Throughout the Old Testament—from creation, to Abraham, the exodus, kings, and prophets—we see a repeating pattern. The people are faithful for a while, seeking to follow God and obey, but time and time again, they turn away from Him and lose their reference point.

The prophet Ezekiel is called to speak into this bleak setting, delivering a somber message to a divided nation that has wandered from God and the very relationship that sets them apart.

Ezekiel's vision is a confronting one: in the inner court of the temple—where the holiest worship should occur—the people had literally turned their backs on God. Their worship had shifted, their hearts had drifted, and they no longer honoured God as the one who brought them out of Egypt and gave them the land they called home. Failure to love God was their first failure.

1. Despite our best efforts and intentions, “we all, like sheep, have gone astray” (Isaiah 53:6). How does recognising this universal tendency help us approach others with humility rather than judgement?



2. God isn't insecure and doesn't need our worship to feel better about Himself. So why does the call to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength matter so much (Mark 12:30)?
3. Looking at the Old Testament stories we've studied so far in this series (Abraham, the Exodus generation, David, Solomon etc.), what common factors do you notice in how people lose their focus on God as their unfailing point of reference?

Read Ezekiel 34:1-6

The people failed to honour God as their first love, and this serious failure is followed by another—their failure to love one another. The entire law can be summed up by these two commands: love God and love others (Matthew 22:37–39), but the people failed on both counts.

God's message through Ezekiel condemns Israel's leaders (the shepherds) who failed to care for the flock. They consumed the benefits of leadership while abandoning the vulnerable, weak, and lost. This lack of care pushed the most vulnerable to the fringes and ultimately was to the detriment of everyone. The whole community suffered because of it. Until, through the exile, God said, "Enough".

1. Think about the spheres where you have influence (family, work, community, church etc.). In what ways are you called to "shepherd" or care for others?
2. How can we guard against consuming the benefits of our positions and neglecting the responsibility to care for those who depend on us?

Read Psalm 137:1-4

The Israelites sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept, unable to sing the Lord's songs in a foreign land where they were captives. It's a moment of deep pain and disorientation, but the exile is not a random political event; it's God's response to His people's persistent rejection of His ways.

Their sin and rebellion couldn't continue unchecked. So, like a driving instructor slamming the dual-control brake, God stepped in to bring judgement and justice. Yet, the exile was also an act of God's mercy, an invitation to realign with His heart and a chance to know once again that "I, the Lord their God, am with them and that they, the Israelites, are my people, declares the Sovereign Lord" (Ezekiel 34:30-31).



1. Most of us have never experienced the kind of displacement described here in Psalm 137. How might reflecting on this help us pray and act with compassion for refugees and displaced people today?
2. The Israelites asked, "How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" Have you ever felt spiritually displaced or unable to connect with God during difficult circumstances?
3. Even in exile, the Israelites preserved, and in many ways, used their time well (you may like to read the story of Daniel or Esther, or explore the number of Scriptures that were compiled during this period). How can you use difficult seasons as opportunities for spiritual growth and contribution to God's Kingdom?

Read Ezekiel 34:11-16

Even in the midst of judgement, there is hope. God promised to be the shepherd that the human leaders failed to be, and eventually the exiles did return home. Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of their rebuilding efforts. But even back in the promised land, things were not the same. They were still under foreign rule, still paying taxes, still waiting for the fullness of God's promises.

That "in-between" feeling is something we can relate to today. Jesus is the good shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one who is lost and bring them home (John 10:11). By His blood, we are brought into a new relationship with God. And yet, life still feels fractured. We still see injustice. We still feel the ache of a world that is not as it should be.

Paul captures this tension in Romans 8:22, saying that all of creation is groaning like it's in the pains of childbirth. God's Kingdom has begun but is not yet fulfilled. We live as people who are waiting for the day when everything will finally be made right.

1. How does God's promise to be the shepherd contrast with the failures of human shepherds described earlier in the chapter?
2. We live as people in between exile and home—still walking through brokenness but with assurance that our eternal home is certain. How do you experience this tension in your daily life?
3. In a world that is increasingly polarised, what pressures do you face to respond with hate rather than love? How can we help each other realign our hearts and our actions to "love God and love others" in all we do?



Optional Activity

Realignment with God is not a one-time event but a continual process. Each day brings new distractions and currents that can pull us away. The call is to pause, reorient, and fix our eyes on God, allowing Him to guide our steps.

Invite the group to spend a few moments in quiet prayer, asking God to show them where they might be out of alignment with His heart. Then, if they feel comfortable, allow members to share one way they want to realign with loving God and loving others this week. Pray together, asking God to strengthen your group to live out His call to love – even when it is costly.

For Further Study

Encourage each person to read **John 10** sometime during the week, reflecting on Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Suggest writing down one verse or phrase that stands out to them and using it as a prayer focus.

Suggested Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we realign ourselves with you today. Thank you for the great shepherd who seeks us, heals us, and brings us home. Help us to love you and love others, even those we find hard to love. We do this with your help, through Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. May this be our story—not just individually, but as a church community. May we be known as a people who love God wholeheartedly and love others courageously. And may we invite others into this grand story of hope, restoration, and homecoming. Amen.

Bible Reading Plan & Resources

As we engage in this sermon series and reflect on ‘The Story’ of God’s redemptive pursuit of humanity, we invite you to practise the discipline of regular Bible reading. You may like to use the [NewHope Bible Reading Plan](#) which has been developed to accompany each sermon over the next 12-weeks. Get a physical copy at church, download a digital copy from our website or follow NewHope in the Bible App for daily updates.

There are also many other wonderful ways to engage with Scripture and you can find a collection of resources, such as books, apps, courses, and more at newhope.net.au/the-story.