

## THE STORY CHAPTER 19 The Return Home

Today's chapter in *The Story* is all about coming home.

Let's see where chapter 19 fits in the Story

Please look at your timeline

Now... turn the timeline over.... Go over the first 4 movements

That left only the southern nation of Judah

They had a special privilege.. of the 12 tribes of Israel, they are the one God chose to bring us the Messiah – Jesus Christ. but also a special responsibility. They were supposed to accurately represent God to the other nations, to show the nations around them the character of God by the way they lived.

They didn't.... and If God continued to bless them as they did evil and flirted with the worship of other gods, it would send a confusing message about the nature of God and bring into question whether or not their really was a God at all.

If they kept living the way they did how could anyone take seriously what they had to say about the one true God. How could any of them take seriously what they said about God's plan to provide the way for all people, not just the Jews, to come back into relationship with God.

So God allowed them, like their brothers in the northern kingdom before them, to be defeated and deported.... To Babylon... this is God's discipline... not designed to destroy them but to correct them...

as we pick up the story... God's period of discipline is coming to an end... the discipline has worked, they are wanting to once again live as his

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covenant people should.. and so it is time for them to go home... to Judah and Jerusalem.

Go to the circles 6 and Write in the dates of the three returns... 538 to 432 BC

From the upper story they need to go home .... for so many reasons

They need to be back So that they don't lose their belief in the one true God, lose their memory of God's covenant with them and God's promise of a Messiah...if they stay too long that could happen

and they need to be back so that everything that needs to be in place for the Messiah to come will be ready... they need to come back so that 500 later some of their descendents will be shephards abiding in the fields, one of them will be a young man named Joseph and one a young woman named Mary who will have a child unlike any other, the desire of all nations. The Messiah, the savior

Big Picture... God is making sure they come back so that we can come back to God....

And God is doing something else at the same time. in the lower story... He orchestrates their return in such a way that we, thousands of years later, could learn from how they came home.... Lessons to help us come home whenever we have left the place we need to be.

that place could have been in close relationship to a loved one

Or that place could have been a place where you were living in victory over hurts, habits and hang ups but now you find yourself in back in a place of defeat and guilt

Or that place could have been a place where you once lived passionately for Jesus...

Max Lucado describes the "closet of forgotten passions" in his house. In it is a neglected telescope from when he had a passion for astronomy. In it is a stepping stone kit for their garden—unopened. In it are boxes of photos that have never been arranged in albums.

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It is possible that in your closet of forgotten passions was a passion to live for Jesus, serve him, spread his kingdom, spend time in his word and in his presence

You still believe... but you no longer live in the place of passion for Jesus that you once called home...

And as a result... things are not working out very well right now...

Jesus calls us to seek FIRST his kingdom and God will take care of everything else.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "If we put first things first, we get the second things thrown in; but if we put second things first, we lose both the first and second things."

No matter where it is that you need to return to ... you can... that's the lesson of chapter 19... so take good notes...

we are going to see 4 truths in chapter 19 about how not only to get back to where you need to be but how to stay there as well... I am going to call these the 4 truths of return

### **1. God will make a way.**

If you really want to return home... God will make a way when there seems to be no way. You might feel that there is no way... too much water under the bridge.. too much hurt and pain... no way you can ever see it happening...

That's what the people of Judah must have felt... how could they go back? They were powerless and poor and held against their will by the most powerful nation on earth. To go back would take a miracle,,, it would take God changing the heart of a heathen king... Can God even do that?

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

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<sup>2</sup> “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

“The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. <sup>3</sup> Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. <sup>4</sup> And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.”

*Pg. 263; Ezra 1:1-4*

God intervened from the Upper Story to open the door for their return. He turned the heart of a pagan king, the most powerful man in the world at the time, towards Judah.

“The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.” Proverbs 21:1 ESV

He can make a way for you as well.

For those of you thinking there is no human way possible for you to return home.. you are right... but I’m not talking about human ways

If God can change the heart of a heathen king.. he can change your heart, the heart of that loved one you hurt, the heart of that parent whose trust you shattered...

That’s what we have been seeing over and over again for 19 weeks... God is in charge... God is directing your lower story and those of every other person connected to yours

That’s the first truth of return... God can make a way

The second truth of return is this...

**2. Things need to be different.**

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When you return back to a passionate faith in God, or your family, or sobriety, or whatever it is... things can't be the same as when you left.

Because the things that led to your leaving then.. will lead to your leaving again....

It wasn't good enough for the people of Judah to return.. they had to live differently than before if they were going to stay

Staying is the goal.. staying in the will of God. Staying at the side of Jesus, staying in relationships that matter,,,

The people of Judah did 3 things to be sure things would be different now that they were home.

1. They rebuilt the Altar

Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both the morning and evening sacrifices.

*Pg.264; Ezra 3:3*

Why is this significant...What are they doing? The altar was all about repenting, and asking and receiving forgiveness

Their ancestors had stopped doing this... they didn't repent of idol worship... and that led to them being being defeated and deported

Everybody sins,,, but not everybody continually repents and asks for and receives forgiveness...

Unless you make repentance a lifestyle you will find yourself back in a place of exile again.

2. They didn't reinstate a king.

If you recall, God didn't want Israel to appoint a human king. He wanted to lead them directly. But they wanted to be like the other nations and God allowed it. And, as suspected, these kings led them away from God. Now that they are back, their attitude is "been there,

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done that". The next king to sit on the throne of David will be Jesus – who is God wrapped in flesh.

When you get the chance to go back to where you never should have left... you have to do some serious soul searching... did any of my behaviours contribute to what happened... Was my disobedience of something that God's word clearly teaches that contributed to drifting from the place where God meant for me to be?

### 3. They rebuilt the Temple....

It was their place of worship

Under the New Covenant we don't have a temple building.. we are the temple of the Holy Spirit... But like them if we have been far away from relationship with God, if he has been put into our closet of lost passions. we too will need to rebuild a life of worship individually and corporately.

### 3. **Stay alert to the enemy's schemes.**

there will always be someone who doesn't want you to recover, to get better, to go home, to rekindle your passion for Jesus.

For Judah, their primary enemy was the surrounding nations who remembered when Israel was an unstoppable force in the world. This move to "Make Judah Great Again" isn't making the other nations happy.

Their first scheme was to "infiltrate." They offered to join up with Judah to help them build the temple around the altar to God. But Zerubbabel, the leader sniffed out their schemes and made this reply –

"...You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us."

*Pg. 265; Ezra 4:3*

But the enemy didn't stop there. They had many more tricks up their sleeves. They used discouragement, fear, and bribery ... and in the story

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we read that they were successful.. for a while. The People of Judah stopped working on the temple and it laid dormant for 10 years.

Instead of being passionate about God's house they got passionate about their houses. They turned their attention to building their own homes and their own lives.

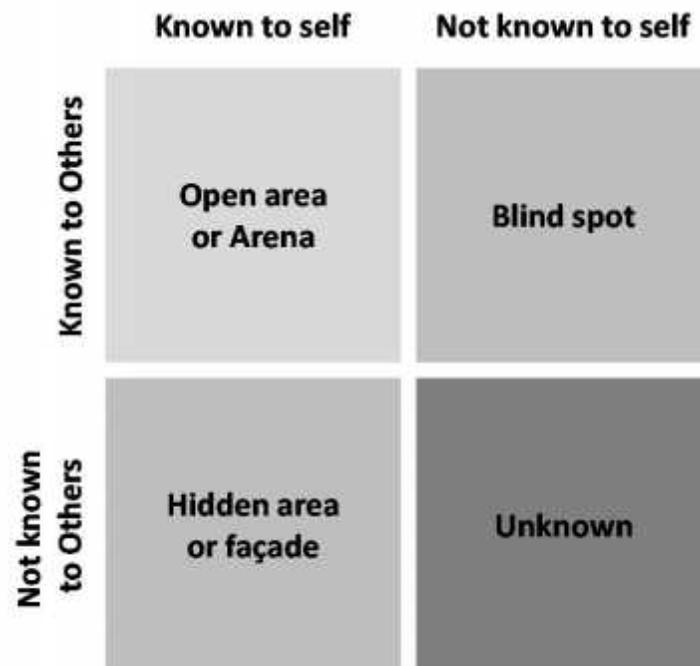
The enemy wins whenever he can get us to live a "Me first and God second." Life...

They are stuck and they are distracted. You might be too... But thank god they didn't stay there.. and neither do we need to stay there...

How did get unstuck. They

#### 4. Remain open to correction.

Let me tell you why we all need to stay open to correction.



**The Johari Window Model**

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God sent the prophet Haggai to Judah to confront them

<sup>3</sup> Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup> “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”

He is talking to them about a quadrant 3 issue... a blind spot

<sup>5</sup> Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>6</sup> You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”

This is a quadrant 4 issue... they didn't know why life wasn't working.. why their paycheck didn't go far enough, why they never could save anything or get ahead... God had to reveal the reason to them and the solution

<sup>7</sup> This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>8</sup> Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the Lord. <sup>9</sup> “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?” declares the Lord Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. <sup>11</sup> I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”

*Pgs. 266-267; Haggai 1:3-9*

The people listened to Haggai, they recovered their passion to build God's temple... they built it and returned to a life of worship Connection with their creator and as a result God patched the holes in their pockets and sent the rain...they were blessed because they responded well to correction

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Here is an observation from nearly 40 years of being a minister – it is true of my life and the lives of people I seek to lead spiritually – most of us are not open to correction. We are not teachable; we don't like to be confronted. When a marriage is deteriorating or an addiction is being formed or a negative behavior is becoming a pattern and a loving friend or family member tries to confront it, most people won't listen.

If you want to be everything God wants you to be in life, you have to find a way to humble yourself and take tough news to heart.

Let me share with you what I am trying to do to get better at this.

The first thing I do when confrontation comes my way is take about ten deep breaths.

The second thing I do is I listen then I tell them I will think about what they have said. If, I know them to be a close friend I also thank them... because it took a lot for them to share what they shared.

I don't automatically think they are right in what they are saying, I take their thoughts to prayer and I also discuss them with people I trust. Sometimes what they tell me is not from God at all... if so I have learned that I must reject it..not own it or let it defeat me.

But other times,,,, what they shared is confirmed by God and others I trust,, I take it to heart and I learn much from it.

The people of Judah took the words of Haggai to heart. They recognized them as God's words... as God telling them that they had developed misplaced priorities, as God telling them that nothing in their lives would work until they rediscovered their passion for God's glory

Worship Team please return:

Prayer for people who need to return home:

1. to the side of a friend or family member,
  2. to a life of victory over hurts, habits and hangups....
  3. To a passionate relationship with Jesus
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Perhaps only you know that you aren't where you used to be with Jesus

Perhaps this is a quadrant 2 issue... the façade quadrant... but

you know you have drifted away... been in your own self imposed exile...  
Jesus is calling you to come back to the special place you and he once  
knew together...

How do you start to come back... do what the people of Judah did.... You  
come to an altar where you repent, ask for and receive repentance.

there was a physical place ours is a spiritual.

I challenge you to build a spiritual altar this morning... a place in your heart  
where you meet with Jesus...

Are you hurting and broken within?

Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin?

Jesus is calling

Have you come to the end of yourself

Do you thirst for a drink from the well?

Jesus is calling

O come to the altar

The Father's arms are open wide

Let's sing

Minister and close

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