Introduction

Spiritual leadership is God’s call to every believer.

In some way God wants to use each of us to positively influence others to grow in Christ. Through our life example and service, we are called to not only be a disciple of Jesus, but to “make disciples” of Jesus.

For us to do this effectively, we must understand some spiritual dangers and diseases along the way — things that are destructive to us and to others.

We must also be able to recognize the symptoms of these diseases and dangers.

The latter part of the book of Ezra provides some great lessons for those who aspire to be spiritual leaders.

One of the key lessons deals with the issue of spiritual compromise.

To be an effective spiritual leader, we must be on guard against spiritual compromise, and we must also know how to help others who fall prey to it.

Let’s take a look at some of these lessons.

1. Spiritual compromise is very subtle.
Approximately 58 years after the completion of Zerubbabel’s Temple, a teaching priest names Ezra led another group of Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem. This group of 1,500 men and their families traveled for four months and excitedly arrived in the holy city.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem Ezra was surprised to discover a major spiritual problem among the Jews living there. Following the successful completion of the Temple the builders had embraced some dangerous spiritual patterns of life.

Ezra 9:1, 2 (NIV) After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, “The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.”

What was the problem?

The Jewish people had disobeyed one of God's specific commands concerning their purity as His people. The people of God had spiritually compromised themselves by their involvement with the ungodly people and practices surrounding them.

Why did they compromise themselves in this way?

Through the years they had become spiritually complacent and comfortable. This led to compromise.

Perhaps they were tired of being labeled as “different.” They wanted to be accepted by the cultures surrounding them. Therefore, they began to marry into these foreign cultures.

From these marriage unions came children who were confused in their spiritual identities and commitments.

We are often guilty of the same kind of mistake. If we are not careful we become spiritually complacent and comfortable, or concerned about being different from our culture and this leads to spiritual compromise. The fruit that is born out of our compromise is impure.

We need to know how to recognize this when it is happening to us and others.
What are some of the symptoms of spiritual compromise?

- **Neglect in our devotions.**
- **Decreased interest and involvement in Christian fellowship; especially in church attendance and participation.**
- **Increased tolerance of worldly and carnal appetites, methods and philosophies.**
- **Declining “spiritual temperature.”**
- **Decreased spiritual fruitfulness.**

Spiritual compromise is dangerous because:

- **It happens gradually.**
- **It happens subtly.**
- **It is easily excused and justified.**
- **It doesn't immediately affect our lives negatively.**
- **It leads to serious spiritual consequences.**

Spiritual compromise happened to God’s people in Jerusalem, the ones who had been such a vital part of rebuilding God’s Temple.

2. **Spiritual compromise grieves God’s heart.**

When Ezra learned about the compromise of God's people he was greatly concerned and deeply grieved.

**Ezra 9:3-5 (NIV)** When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. 4 Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I
sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.  

5 Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God.

Why did Ezra respond so intensely? What was so serious about this situation?

This situation was serious because it would eventually cause the collapse of everything that God and these individuals had worked to build.

A fault was developing under the spiritual foundations of their lives which would eventually cause it all to fall.

How often this happens to people. They begin to spiritually build, their lives start taking spiritual shape, and gradually they begin to compromise themselves with the world or the flesh.

When this happens it is not long before their building crumbles and they have to pick up the pieces and begin again.

Ezra was hurt, angry, and determined that he would not let this happen to the people of God. His heart revealed the grief of God’s heart.

The word “appalled” is used to describe the intensity of Ezra’s pain.

This Hebrew word means “to stun, to grow numb, to devastate, to stupefy ... It is something so horrible that it can leave a person speechless.”

The pain of Ezra's heart was expressed in a confessional and intercessory prayer:

Ezra 9:6-15 (NIV) And prayed: “O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to You, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.  

7 From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today.  

8 But now, for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in His sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage.  

9 Though we are slaves, our God has not deserted us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of
Persia: He has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and He has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem. 10 But now, O our God, what can we say after this? For we have disregarded the commands You gave through Your servants the prophets when You said: ‘The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. 11 Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.’ 13 What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, You have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. 14 Shall we again break Your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would You not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor? 15 O LORD, God of Israel, You are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before You in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in Your presence.”

This kind of prayer gave birth to cleansing and spiritual renewal.

It was a prayer prayed with:

- Humility.
- Honesty.
- Responsibility.
- Fervency.
- Seriousness.
- Gratitude.
- Confession.

Spiritual compromise grieves God’s heart. It should grieve us as it did Ezra.
3. God’s grace forgives and restores the fallen.

While it is admirable that Ezra repented for their sins, the people of God needed to personally repent for their spiritual compromise. They needed to feel the conviction for their wrong which would give birth to cleansing and revival in their hearts.

Ezra's example of heart-felt repentance influenced others:

Ezra 10:1-3 (NIV) While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites — men, women and children— gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. 2 Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, “We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. 3 Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law.

Never underestimate your power of spiritual influence. One Ezra can affect thousands of others! Ezra’s prayer brought others to a place of honesty with God.

Note the impact of Ezra’s life and prayer on others:

- His repentant heart attracted the attention of many others.
- His repentant prayer resulted in conviction, confession, and cleansing in many others.
- His repentant cry gave birth to hope in the hearts of God's people.
- His repentant example paved the way for repentant actions on the part of the people.

Because of Ezra’s influence these people, the ones who had worked so diligently to see God’s temple built in Jerusalem, were saved from spiritual danger and disaster caused by their spiritual compromise.

Ezra is a great example for us. His example reminds us to stay away from spiritual compromise and to care about those who slip into its subtle grip.