5. Some might accuse Ezra of being proud or foolish. Do you think either of these played into his decision?

6. What do you make of the risk when you realize that Ezra was carrying more than 25 tons of silver and 3.5 tons of gold on a 4-month wilderness journey?

7. What did Ezra do in verse 21 that was key to reflecting faith in God to the king and others?

8. When things are risky, what do you think it means to God if you chose to fast and pray? What might it do for you personally?

9. Is buying insurance, saving for retirement, or getting a vaccination a sign of small faith?

10. Where are some places where God calls you to trust in him rather than the safeguards of the world?

Week Overview: “Trusting God’s Protection”

The other day at the district Men’s Retreat I spoke with a guy from Dubuque who works for IBM. I asked him what his role in the company was. He told me that he worked in the area of security for cloud-based data and applications.

We hear much these days about cyber-security and the importance of guarding against threats that could lead to identity theft, a threat that was virtually unknown 50 years ago. The internet is a great tool, but it has opened up one more avenue where we are encouraged to take steps to protect ourselves.

Even young children think of protection. A preschooler may fight to prevent the castle he has constructed with building blocks from a jealous peer who wants to kick it over. A fifth-grader may protect his younger brother or sister from bullies in school. A young soccer student or hockey player learns how to protect the goal. A teenage girl might argue with a classmate in order to protect her reputation among her peers.

There is something hardwired within each of us that prompts us to guard, defend, preserve, and protect the things we value. They may be tangible like a bicycle or a pickup truck, or intangible, like our credit score or our freedom.

Our approach to guarding the things we value in life reflects the measure of our confidence in God. We can become self-reliant guardians to the point where others look at our lives and do not see living trust in Jesus. How can we grow in trusting God when trusting ourselves is more natural?
Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, “The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him.” So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kinsmen with them. And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king and his counselors and his lords and all Israel there present had offered. I weighed out into their hand 650 talents of silver, and silver vessels worth 200 talents, and 100 talents of gold, 20 bowls of gold worth 1,000 darics, and two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold. And I said to them, “You are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your fathers. Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of fathers’ houses in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the LORD.” So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God.

Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way. We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days. On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed into the hands of Meremoth the priest, son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jozabad the son of Jeshua and Noadiah the son of Binnui. The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded.

1. Discuss some of the things that are part of your daily life that fall into the category of protection. They help safeguard things like your health, your family, and your property. See how many you can list as a discussion group:

2. Our culture offers an endless number of tools we can use to protect ourselves and our investments. Consider the “protection” that you are offered when you buy an electronic item from Best Buy or Sears. Think about the trip insurance you can buy when you book a motel room or an airplane ticket through certain vendors. Talk together about some of those times when you have the opportunity to add some kind of protection to your life and choose not to. What are the reasons you decline an offer of protection?

3. All of us are aware of situations where people did not have protection and wish they had. Someone might switch jobs and have a gap in health coverage or bring an old car insurance policy to a newer vehicle and forget to cover more than liability. Discuss any circumstances where you may have incurred loss because you did not protect something of value.

4. Ezra 8:22 gives us the reason that Ezra decided not to ask the king for military protection. What was his reason?