

J O U R N E Y O F A M I L I T A R Y W I F E

Deployed Steps of Hope
in Times of Uncertainty

**SMALL GROUP
FACILITATOR GUIDE**

(JOURNEY 2)



AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

He's Home! Time for Grateful Celebration (Week 1)

Waypoints 1–5 · Ezra 1:1–3:11

Materials needed

- Whiteboard or chalkboard
- Symbol of celebration (i.e., birthday candle, flag, invitation, photos of reunion ceremony, etc.)

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Show your symbols of celebration and ask what they have in common.
- All of these things are symbols of celebration. Celebrations are a way we mark significant events. Turn to a friend and describe the last “celebration” you planned or attended.
- After a few minutes of discussion, allow a few participants to share their responses.
- How did you or will you celebrate your husband’s return from deployment?
- The return of your husband from a deployment is something worth celebrating! Reintegration can take an unpredictable route and celebrating progress will strengthen existing family bonds.

Read the map (15 minutes)

Introduction to Ezra–Nehemiah

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah take place during what we could describe in a military context as redeployment. The pages do not record a people returning from war, but rather a people returning from exile. In 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, captured Jerusalem, destroyed the Jewish Temple, and forced much of the population into Babylon. Here they remained for 70 years until Cyrus, king of Persia allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Jewish temple.¹

Three redeployments to Jerusalem are recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Zerubbabel led the first return to Jerusalem. He provided leadership for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Ezra led the second redeployment. God used him to lead the nation of Israel in a renewal of their commitment to love and serve God. Nehemiah led the third redeployment with the goal to rebuild the city wall.

During the next six weeks we will journey with Ezra and Nehemiah as God used them to rebuild a sense of community and purpose in the nation of Israel. Their journey home included many things military families experience during the period of reintegration following a deployment, not the least of which is celebration!

¹ Naomi E Pasachoff and Robert J. Littman, *A Concise History of the Jewish People* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 43.

Celebration in Ezra 1:1–3:11

God established celebrations through festivals and feasts. Celebration is a primary means to express joy and gratitude.

What are some of the reasons for celebration found in the first three chapters of Ezra?

- Cyrus, king of Persia, permitted the Jews to return to their homeland after seventy years of captivity (1:1–4).
- God moved on neighbors to aid them with gold, silver, goods, animals, and offerings to help in the return (1:6).
- The king allowed the exiles to return vessels taken from Solomon’s temple (Ezra 1:7–11).
- The returning exiles built the altar (3:2–3).
- The Feast of Booths was observed and celebrated (3:4)
- The returning exiles laid the foundation of the temple (3:10–11).

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

The Jews stopped and celebrated the completion of the foundation of the temple. They still had much work to do before they completed the work, yet they celebrated.

Why would they celebrate before the temple was finished?

How can celebrating along the way aid in the process of reintegration?

Joy and gratitude are elements of true celebration. What are some ways you can incorporate these into your reintegration process to celebrate steps in the right direction?

What positive results can come from such celebrations?

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Read and underline anything that stands out to you.

Shawna described how her family celebrated R&R and reintegration in this manner: “Nothing sweeter for us than the ‘reintegration.’ The kids went to school but dad showed up during lunch-time. Of course, he was the hero! For R&R we shared him one night and had all his friends come by the house for a catered drop in. It was so fun having our friends come by to see him and cheer us on for the last stretch. Sweet memories!”

For Rachel, observing everyday things became celebratory for her and her husband during their reintegration. She told us, “Keep the extended family and big vacation plans on hold for a little while. All my guy wanted was to be home and get back to the normal, everyday things of life. Also, if you do more than one deployment, don’t expect each time to be the same. Deployment number 1 reintegration was totally different from deployment number 2 reintegration ... one was easy breezy, and one was a little tougher.”

What are your thoughts?

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

What is one thing you can do this week to celebrate your progress during your reintegration?

He's Home! Time for Realistic Expectation (Week 2)

Waypoints 6–10 · Ezra 3:12–8:21

Materials needed

- Chalkboard or whiteboard

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Listen to this story about expectations: “I stopped at Chick-fil-A for lunch today after an appointment. I had quickly changed clothes before the appointment and left my wallet behind, realizing this only after ordering and pulling forward in the drive thru lane. When I pulled up to the window, I asked if they accepted checks. The young man working the window asked the girl next to him and she said, ‘No.’ Without missing a beat, they both looked at me and said, ‘Lunch is on us today! Enjoy!’ I was totally surprised. That is not what I was expecting. I was prepared to apologize for my mistake and drive away empty handed.”²
- Have you ever experienced something beyond your expectations?
- Expectations can be exceeded and bring surprise and joy, or they can be unmet and bring disappointment. Reintegration following a deployment can be a challenging time for your family as you return to a functioning system. Managing expectations during this time is key to success.

Read the map (15 minutes)

- The returning Jews in the book of Ezra would have done well to manage their expectations during their reintegration. The exiles completed the foundation of the temple and they stopped to celebrate their progress.
- What emotions are evident in Ezra 3:12–13 as they looked upon the completed foundation? Some shouted for joy, while others wept aloud.
- What was the reason for the weeping? Things were not as they used to be.
- The older Jews, who experienced the majesty of the first temple, were disappointed that this temple would not have the same grandeur. In remembering the temple before the exile, some focused on the negative that kept them from seeing the possibilities that change could bring.³
- What brought discouragement and unmet expectations in Ezra 4:21? The opposition that formed against them forced an adjustment to their timetable.

² “Not What I Expected...” <http://www.chick-fil-a.com/Story/Detail/17009>, (Accessed March 24, 2015).

³ Mark D. Roberts, *The Preacher's Commentary, Volume 11: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 72.

- This time for the returning Jews was hopeful—but hard; encouraging—but tough.⁴ They experienced redeployment “mash-up.”

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

Combining elements from contrasting sources creates a “mash-up.” How would you describe reintegration “mash-up?”

In what ways have you experienced reintegration mash-up?

What do such conflicting emotions have to do with expectations?

How can you prepare yourself for or manage such conflicting emotions?

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Read these comments from fellow military wives about expectations. Underline anything that stands out to you.

Amanda offered this advice on communication after deployment: “Make sure you communicate your expectations about everything and anything you can think of! Make a list if need be and really just be honest! There is nothing worse than all the unspoken expectations ruining a reunion blessing!”

Monica said, “Don’t expect too much right away. Give yourself a few weeks to reacquaint.”

Michele shared that reintegration “can be a slow process. Give you, him, and the kids a little extra grace for as long as necessary. Everyone changes when the soldier is absent and those changes occurred over time. It will take time to change back or adjust to the new norm.”

What are your observations?

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

Can you identify an unrealistic expectation for reintegration that you will relinquish? Write it in the space provided on your handout.

We can base our expectations on the promises of God. He promises to complete what he starts. He will help you complete the process of reintegration.

Pray based on Philippians 1:6 to conclude this session: Thank you Lord, for the confidence that you who began a good work in us will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

⁴ Ralph Davis, “God’s People in Gray Times (Ezra 3),” *IIIM Magazine Online* (2), no. 45, (November, 2000), 1–3.

He's Home! Time for Careful Observation (Week 3)

Waypoints 11–15 · Ezra 8:26–9:9

Materials needed

- Chalkboard or whiteboard
- Paper and pen for Powers of Observation Game
- Military items on tray (items might include a small flag, a yellow ribbon, a military medal, a military patch, etc.)

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Powers of Observation Game: Give each participant a piece of paper and a pen and say, “I’ve asked _____ to show you some military items. When she comes into the room, pay close attention to her.” Invite one of the participants to enter the room with a tray of military items (flag, medal, yellow ribbon, patch, etc.). Instruct her to walk around with the tray, giving everyone a few moments to look, and then leave the room.
- Ask the participants questions, not about what was on the tray, but about the woman holding the tray. For example, “Was she wearing nail polish? What color was her outfit? What kind of shoes was she wearing? What did her earrings look like?” etc.
- Note: The ability to be observant of more than the obvious can be a helpful tool as you and your spouse navigate reintegration. An observant person will pay attention to details and nonverbal cues and look beyond the obvious.
- What are some issues that need careful observation during reintegration, as discussed in Waypoints 11–14? Family finances, husband’s behavior, negative emotions, guilt, sadness, etc.

Read the map (15 minutes)

Describe the scene in Ezra 9:3–4.

If you were observing Ezra, what might you think?

What was the cause of Ezra’s behavior? The Jewish people married those who were members of ungodly, pagan religions. Jewish law prohibited this practice. The disobedience of the people broke Ezra’s heart and he felt the need to confess to God for the sin of the people. *Be sure to emphasize* this was not about ethnicity, this was about holiness and obedience to God’s law.

How is the scene different in Ezra 9:5–6? At a set time, Ezra rose and took his emotions to God in prayer. Ezra knelt, bowed his head, and spread out his hands to plead with God for help.

Ezra 9:5 provides a model for emotionally paralyzing situations. Ezra allows himself to feel the negative emotions that come with bad news, but he does not stay in that dark place.

What does his posture communicate? His posture communicates need, humility, and submission to God.⁵ His position changes from one of sitting on his hands feeling hopeless, to one of falling on his knees feeling hopeful.

Read Ezra 9:8–9 and explain how God went the extra mile for the Jewish people.

How have you seen God go the extra mile for you?

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

The waypoints this week dealt with issues of finance, behavior, guilt, confession, and grief. Heavy stuff!

Generally, how do you see military families dealing with “heavy” reintegration issues?

Do you feel there is a stigma attached to seeking help for deployment/reintegration issues? Why or why not?

Combat Trauma is one of the “heavy” issues that military families may face. If you are experiencing this, do not minimize or ignore the need for help. God wants to help you and your husband find help and healing.⁶

What were positive things Ezra did to aid a successful return to Jerusalem (reintegration)? He practiced careful financial management (Ezra 8:26–30); he allowed himself to feel and express his grief and disappointment (Ezra 9:3); he did not stay stuck in his grief and disappointment (Ezra 9:5); he confessed his guilt to God; he praised God for his help (Ezra 9:8–9).

Travelogue (10 minutes)

On the topic of seeking help, Aimee reported, “The best advice I got following our first deployment was from a military chaplain who said, ‘The first few days and weeks are a glorious honeymoon but then the work of finding your new normal begins and that can be challenging. If you are six to eight weeks into reintegration and still do not feel like you’re finding common ground again, seek out help.’ So thankful for that Chaplain’s advice—with a timeline!”

Rachel also commented, “Understand that it takes a while to find your relationship “norm” again. Also, depending on what your spouse may have experienced during deployment, there will be an emotional and psychological transition period for them. It’s normal. Don’t overreact—be gracious and open to communication without being forceful. Try to understand the trauma.”

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

List your top three concerns about your family’s reintegration. What is one action you can take for each concern?

Read Psalm 32 as a closing prayer.

⁵ Leslie C. Allen and Timothy S. Laniak, *Understanding the Bible: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 75.

⁶ For more in-depth study on the topic of trauma from war: *When War Comes Home: Christ-Centered Healing for Wives of Combat Veterans* by Chris Adsit, Rahnella Adsit, and Marshelle Carter Wadell (Newport News, VA: Military Ministry Press, 2008).

He's Home! Time for Honest Communication

Waypoints 16–20 · Nehemiah 1:1–3:12

Materials needed

- Chalkboard or whiteboard
- Notes with instructions, “Ignore your partner.”

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Pair up participants and instruct them to decide who will discuss a hobby or interest. Instruct the other person (through a written note) to ignore the partner when she starts to talk. Be sure not to let the “talker” know the content of the note.
- After a couple of minutes of one-way conversation, discuss the frustration that comes with not feeling heard or acknowledged.

Read the map (15 minutes)

- Waypoints 16–20 introduce us to Nehemiah. Nehemiah, a Jew, was an important official in the court of the Persian king.
- If possible, divide into three groups or pairs and give one of the following sections to each group to read, discuss, and report:
- What characteristics of healthy communication do you see in Nehemiah 1:1–4? Nehemiah listened with empathy to the honest assessment some Jewish leaders offered about the condition of the walls of Jerusalem.
- What characteristics of healthy communication do you see in Nehemiah 2:1–5? Nehemiah’s countenance caused the king to ask, “What’s wrong?” The king did not ignore or criticize Nehemiah. Nehemiah responded with honesty.
- What characteristics of healthy communication do you see in Nehemiah 2:11–16? Nehemiah was discreet. He did not overreact to criticism. He quietly processed his thoughts and made an honest assessment.
- List the positive characteristics of communication on a whiteboard as the groups report.

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

How can you incorporate the characteristics of Nehemiah’s communication into your marriage and family?

What are ways you have worked toward healthy communication with your husband, during deployment and reintegration?

Nehemiah’s approach was an example of discretion in communication. How would you define discretion? Discretion is the attribute of speaking in way that does not offend or reveal private information.

Why is discretion valuable in marriage and family relationships?

What positive strategies can you use to ensure discretion when dealing with social media and personal issues?

What do these Scriptures teach about discretion and communication?

- Proverbs 11:22
- Proverbs 2:11
- Proverbs 21:23
- 1 Corinthians 13:11
- Psalm 19:14

Travelogue (10 minutes)

When asked about communication and reintegration, a military wife responded: “It really is a different process for each person, and for each time. After the first deployment, we just picked up right where we left off. The second deployment, I was surprised, was not so easy. My husband had many temper flare-ups. He seemed impatient with our kids and me. That is so unlike my kind, easygoing husband. *We kept talking, and that was the key.* After several months, things fell back into their natural rhythm.”

Can you relate? How?

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

Instruct the group to respond in silence to this section of their handout.

How would you rate your communication in these areas?

(1) poor (2) fair, (3) good (4) very good (5) excellent

- I am careful to listen.
- I listen with empathy.
- I respond with honesty.
- I use discretion with others and on social media.

What is one step you can take this week to improve communication in one of these areas?

Pray based on Proverbs 2:2—*Make our ears attentive to wisdom and incline our hearts to understanding.*

He's Home! Time for Focused Determination

Waypoints 21–25 · Nehemiah 4:6–6:16

Materials needed

- Chalkboard or whiteboard

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- Share with a partner something you are determined to do in your lifetime.
- Determination is a dominant theme in the life of Nehemiah.

Read the map (15 minutes)

Describe the scene in Nehemiah 4:1–4. Nehemiah and the returning exiles were in the process of rebuilding. Not happy about the progress, enemies with selfish motives hurled insults, surrounded the builders, and were ready to attack.

Join with a partner and look at the following verses in Nehemiah. Report what you discover about the perseverance and dedication of Nehemiah, the builders, or the enemies.

- Nehemiah 4:6
- Nehemiah 4:15–17
- Nehemiah 4:21
- Nehemiah 5:16
- Nehemiah 6:1–4

Rebuilding the wall was not something Nehemiah decided to do on a whim. God called him to do the work—a work so significant he could not afford to be distracted. He responded to those who would sidetrack him with a confident “NO”: “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?” He was determined to complete the work!

In spite of continued opposition, Nehemiah and his team of builders completed the work in record time—fifty-two days. Notice the perspective of Nehemiah, “... this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.” Nehemiah could not attribute the accomplishment by ordinary human effort. The timeframe was impressive, but the timeframe was not the point. God’s work on behalf of the people was the point. God was the one who stirred the hearts of people to work, to persevere, and finally to prosper.⁷

Nehemiah proclaimed the “wall was completed,” but he did not mean the work was done. Keep reading in Nehemiah Chapter 6 (verses 17–19), and you will discover the hostilities toward the returning Jews

⁷ James M. Hamilton, *Exalting Jesus in Ezra–Nehemiah* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2014), 145.

continued. Rebuilding the wall was not an end in itself, but it was a step toward continued positive reform for the returning nation.

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

What can you learn from Nehemiah's strategy for completing God's work in Nehemiah 4:9, 14 and 20?

What do you learn about priorities from Nehemiah's example?

What are things that can weaken your determination to have a successful reintegration?

What lesson on determination do you find in Colossians 1:11?

Travelogue (10 minutes)

Katie is a determined military wife. When reflecting on reintegration she wrote: "Don't box yourself into a timeline for reintegration. There are times when it goes quickly and smoothly and then there are times that it can be quite long and unpredictable. It is *not* a linear process. It can be quite messy. It is okay to ask for outside help when things just do not seem to be progressing. Prayer, patience, and perseverance!"

Can you relate? How?

How do Katie's words encourage you?

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

Write one word to describe how you see God's power working in your life to help you persevere and remain dedicated to finding a new normal after deployment.

What challenges your determination to have a successful reintegration?

Finish this sentence: With God's help I determine to _____!

Pray Colossians 1:11 as a closing prayer: "I pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy, thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us" (The Message).

He's Home! Time for Joyful Dedication (Week 6)

Waypoints 26–30 · Nehemiah 7:5–12:43

Materials needed

- Chalkboard or whiteboard
- Items that symbolize dedication

Stop and get your bearings (5 minutes)

- Begin the class with prayer.
- Ask if anyone would like to share a highlight from the readings of the past week.

Where shall we go? (10 minutes)

- What are items you consider symbols of dedication?
- Show the item(s) you brought that symbolize dedication (i.e., wedding ring, dedication certificate, Bible, trophy or medal, handmade item, vintage item, etc.)
- The waypoints you read this week had much to do with dedication. The people signed a document, observed a festival, and marched around a city wall. Action always accompanies true dedication.

Read the map (15 minutes)

Chapters 9 and 10 of Nehemiah describe a symbol of dedication in the form of a covenant agreement with God that Nehemiah and many of the residents of Jerusalem signed.

Invite someone to read aloud Nehemiah 9:32–38.

These words are a portion of a long prayer of praise and confession from Nehemiah. The actual signing of names to a document followed the prayer. This agreement was a recommitment to the promise that the returning Jews would live their lives according to God's truth.

Why would signing their names to a document be significant? Written plans validate priorities. The people had a desire to protect and continue the reforms they had made upon returning to Jerusalem. Attaching their names to a document bound them to that purpose. They were willing to publicly pledge their loyalty to God's cause.

What commitment did the residents of Jerusalem make to God? Assign each verse to a person or pair.

- Nehemiah 10:28, 30—Separation from the world (emphasize this is not about ethnicity, but about holiness and obedience to what God had instructed them about marriage to pagans)
- Nehemiah 10:29—Submission to God's Word
- Nehemiah 10:31—Set aside a day to honor God and to rest
- Nehemiah 10:39—Support God's work through giving

Take time to explore (15 minutes)

The people of Jerusalem made a binding agreement to follow God whole-heartedly. They dedicated themselves to God's cause by signing a covenant agreement.

What are the benefits of signing such a covenant? They help us focus. They are a means to express our love.

In a small group or pair, create a list of activities or actions you and/or your family can do to demonstrate your dedication to one another and to God. (Invite the groups to share their ideas with the larger group. If not mentioned, you may add such things as: joining hands around the table to pray, developing a family covenant that each member signs, and doing a prayer walk around your home.)

We can talk about dedication. We can make vows. We can sign covenants. However, action must accompany true dedication. Dedication employs our will. Dedication starts in the heart, but we carry it out with action.

Travelogue (10 minutes)

What word of advice and wisdom from your reintegration journey would you offer a military wife?

Pack your bags (5–10 minutes)

Dedication starts in the heart, but we carry it out with action. Consider an activity or action that will be symbolic of your renewed dedication to your marriage, your family, and God in this season of reintegration. Choose one thing from the list of ideas created by the group to incorporate into your family this week.