

# GOD FIRST

## WEEK 3 DAY 1

*It's because of you that the heavens withhold the dew and the earth produces no crops. NLT*

We see many examples in the bible of people being punished for their actions. In our own lives we can look back and see where our unwise decisions brought us consequences. The people of Jerusalem had neglected their priorities and they were paying for it. Instead of nurturing their personal relationships with God they were busy trying to nurture their crops. Note, there is nothing wrong with wanting our crops to grow but if we let it consume us and allow it to take the place of God in our life then it becomes a problem.

*But where your treasure is, there will your heart also be. -Luke 12:34*

With a word God gave them drought. He withheld the essentials for crop growth and animal production. So the people made new plans to compensate. They worked harder and longer hours to try to make up for their losses. But nothing was working and unfortunately they weren't turning to God for help. Instead, they were letting their focus take them further away from God. They were so far into their plan that they didn't see the signs. Their eyes were fixed on themselves and missed God's warning.

Do you get so caught up in your own life that you miss God's warning signs?  
When things don't go as planned do you turn to God or work alone?

*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. -Matthew 6:33*

It is so easy to get caught up in our personal stuff. We must remember that God is continuously working for our good. He constantly thinks of each and every one of us calling us back to Him when we wonder off. His plan isn't to bring suffering or pain but sometimes it is the only thing that will grab our attention. It is our responsibility to keep Him first in our lives so that we see the signs. If we are always seeking Him then God's warnings will be less and definitely easier to recognize so that we don't have to go through the punishment. In the end It really comes down to where our values lie and whether we uphold those values when things don't go as planned.

Do we value God's opinion and His help over our own ideas?  
Do we value our relationship with God enough to follow His commands?

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## WEEK 3 DAY 2

*I have called for a drought on your fields and hills - a drought to wither the grain and grapes and olive trees and all your other crops, a drought to starve you and your livestock and to ruin everything you have worked so hard to get. NLT*

The people were trusting in themselves for their security. They left God out of their decisions. They were no longer allowing God to work through them. They had disconnected from the vine and were doing everything on their own. This proved to be disastrous for them. Their crops were suffering and their harvest was small. We too can get so focused on what is happening right in front of us that our concentration serves the issue at hand and we just continue on with the flow of our lives, leaving God out. We are so focused that we forget to call on God or seek His wisdom. Even when the outcome is bad we keep digging a deeper hole by working overtime to fix the issue instead of handing over the shovel to God. Sometimes we get so content where we are and we forget all together that God hasn't been a part of our lives for months or years.

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. - John 15:5 NIV*

When we disconnect from God our production is small and useless. The things we bring in and the accomplishments we make are worthless if they aren't working for God and His Kingdom. Apart from Him we are nothing and apart from Him our work is too.

Are you connected to God right now?

What are some things that draw you away from God?

How can you start to reconnect and what are some ways you can stay in Him?

# GOD FIRST

## WEEK 3 DAY 3

Without even knowing it, the Israelites had a problem greater than their lack of grain; their problem was idolatry. You may say, "but they were not bowing to a carved or created statue so how could idolatry be their issue?" Let's look at the meaning of idolatry.

The definition of idolatry, according to Webster, is "the worship of idols or excessive devotion to, or reverence for some person or thing." In Old Testament times the people physically bowed to carved or created idols expecting the idol to act on their behalf. They worked to please the god and gain something from it in return, which was an obvious act of idolatry. But, there are less obvious acts of idolatry such as placing our hopes and dreams in another person, having a deep love of our possessions or position, and pride in ourselves. Idolatry is a matter of the heart. Idolatry is rebellion against God.

The Israelites had become their own god, trying to solve the problems before them. No, they weren't bowing to a statue created to represent a deity, but they sure were not putting God first in their lives. They looked to the earth to provide what they needed instead of asking for it from the hand of God. Worldly ways and passions had taken the place of God in their lives.

God has known us from the beginning. He knew that we would wander that's why he cautioned man from the very beginning about idolatry:

*"You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me"*  
(Exodus 20:3-5).

So how about you? What idols have you erected that need to come down? Do you value others opinions of you more than God's? Do your possessions require your time and resources leaving little if anything for God? Does pride or self-sufficiency keep you from depending fully on the Lord and his provision?

Take today to invite the Spirit to speak to you about your idols. Let's offer our hearts to the Lord:

Dear Jesus,

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I ask that you open my heart and my eyes to the truths of idolatry in my life. Show me where I have placed people, possessions, or my own pride before you. Unveil my eyes to the truth that is often hidden from me by my own justifications or denial. Help me to be obedient to the changes you ask of me. In your holy and precious name, Amen

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WEEK 3 DAY 4

*Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of God's people began to obey the message from the Lord their God. When they heard the words of the prophet Haggai, whom the Lord their God had sent, the people feared the Lord. -NLT*

As the people heard God's message they feared God and repented. Another similar story comes to us from the book of Jonah. Jonah, like Haggai, was chosen to relay God's message of disaster, if those listening weren't willing to hear and obey His command. The people of Nineveh were given one last chance to repent of their sinful ways and follow God. With one declaration they heard God's command and changed.

*The people of Nineveh believed God's message. So they decided that everyone should fast, and all the people, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth to show that they had repented. - Jonah 3:5 GNT*

Jonah's story and Haggai's story are very similar in that there was a message from God and the people were receptive to it and immediately turned from their sin. We too must be receptive to God's Word as He sends us messages today. If we are honest can all relate to the people in both stories who were not living for God, who were sinning and focused on their own lives. What brings us encouragement is that their hearts were open for more and in that moment they heard. It is important for us to have open hearts and minds when it comes to change in our personal lives. We must be in God's word to hear his voice and we must be listening to the people He puts in our lives. God wants to communicate with us and He does so in many ways. It is our responsibility to be open to the things He says to us. We must be in His Word on a regular basis, we must be attending Church and listening to the wise counsel from the friends and pastors that are in our life. We must be putting ourselves in places that will challenge and grow us as we seek to abide in Him on a daily basis. It is very important as you seek to live God first that you feed on Him daily. Stop filling up on things that don't truly satisfy but fill up on God's Word and the love and promises He has for you. Then you will be full!

*He made you go hungry, and then he gave you manna to eat, food that you and your ancestors had never eaten before. He did this to teach you that you must not depend on bread alone to sustain you, but on everything that the Lord says. -Deuteronomy 8:3 GNT*

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God called the people back to Him and they accepted the invitation. Won't you accept your invitation to make your life God First? Are you ready to be open to His calling and be receptive of the requests He has for your life?

*So get rid of every filthy habit and all wicked conduct. Submit to God and accept the word that he plants in your hearts, which is able to save you. -James 1:21 GNT*

Are you in God's Word enough to hear Him speak to you?

Are you open to hear His voice through the many ways He tries to grab your attention?

Are you ready to make a change in your life?

Is there something God is telling you now that you have been ignoring?

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WEEK 3 DAY 5

**"Then Haggai, the LORD'S messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. Haggai 1:13**

This one sentence of the chapter is powerful, encompassing many aspects of God's character. We will see God's forgiveness, faithfulness, and omnipresence. We will feel his power, grace, and comfort! All expressed in 21 little words.

The first aspect of the passage is that Haggai delivers this message, he calls himself "The LORD's messenger". He is clarifying that the message he brings is not his own, but that it is directly from God. It is a message that Haggai has been charged with delivering. I have to wonder if Haggai had reservations about delivering this message. I wonder if in reality he was any different than those to whom he was speaking. I ask this, because as Aimee and I prepare these lessons, I fear that it may appear that we are speaking out of our own ability to have clear, appropriate priorities and live life with unwavering devotion to God. When in reality as we study the message of Haggai, we are being transformed in the process. We are being called to tear down idols, reprioritize time and resources, and rebuild the temple within ourselves. Haggai, regardless of his own imperfections, was bold and courageous. God gave him a message and Haggai was faithful to deliver! I love that! I want to live life that way. Don't you?

I love this because God used the voice of an ordinary man. Haggai had a willing heart, and that was all God needed! God uses ordinary people every day to do his work on earth. Are you staying close enough to hear his voice when he asks you to do something?

The second portion of the message is, "I am with you." Even in their wanderings, rebellion, and ignorance God never left them. He was always present, always watching, always loving. He forgave them before they even knew they were wrong. He faithfully waited until they returned to him. Yes, he was angered by their behavior and disciplined them, but only to call them back to the right way of living. This My Friend, is the way he loves us! What peace and comfort that gives to this girl's ever-wandering heart. How about you?

Finally, we see God's power. We see this exhibited in the phrase 'declares the Lord.' The word *declares* holds emphatic power. It means that God said it with clarity and a certainty. He was publicly making his presence with the people known. He was with them and that was all they needed! He was asking them to do something and all they needed to know that was without doubt, He would lead, provide, and enable them to do what needed to be done! And praise God because this is still true today!

***"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you." Isaiah 43:2***

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*'Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'* Isaiah 41:10

*My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.* Proverbs 3:11-12