

God First: In Times Of Trial

God had reassured the Israelites that he was with them and that reassurance empowered and moved them to rebuild the temple. It was a rough time for them. They had no food, they had wandered from God, their neighbors openly opposed them, their own homes needed rebuilt, and their families were torn apart in the exile. But God had never left them. So, why does God allow these trials in the lives of his children?

To help us answer that, let's look at another instance where God allowed his children to endure a trial. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were exiled and taken under the charge of King Nebuchadnezzar. They were instructed to bow to Neb's gods and worship the statues that he created. They, in allegiance to the one true God, refused to bow. This action found the standing before the king. In response to his threat to bow or be thrown in the fiery furnace, they said,

"King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

(Ok, so I have to admit that as I typed that I literally clapped my hands in applause of their courage and faith!) And the story ends like this... The men don't bow. Their hands are bound, the fire is heated to 7 times its normal temperature, and into the fire they go! However, when the king looks into the furnace he doesn't see 3 men. He sees 4. Scripture tells us that the 4th man is an angel of God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are called from the fire and exit without even the scent of smoke on them. And King Nebechadnezzar honors God!

The point being, God is always with us, even in the trials. Sometimes he plucks us right out of the middle of a trial, but most often he goes with us through the trial to grow our faith, the faith of those watching, and to reveal His character. Our 3 men remained true to God, and he remained true to them. The Israelites wandered and were not true to God, but God remained true to them. God's character traits of never leaving us and always being faithful (regardless of our faithlessness) are revealed through the trials. The Israelites' fickleness was also revealed so now they could fix their flaws.



Trials grow us, reveal our flawed character, and point us to the reason we need a savior. They reveal our need for God and his greatness. God doesn't allow trials to beat you down. He allows them to build you up...

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. -Romans 8:28

What trial are you currently facing?

What is God trying to show you about your character and His?

Dear Lord,

I thank you for being with me in ALL circumstances. Thank you for going into the fire with me and for revealing the truth of these biblical stories that just like the Israelites, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, I never have to face any situation alone. Help me to learn from life's circumstances. Keep me from discouragement and anger when trials come by keeping my eyes glued to the truth that you are with me and working for my good... even when the fire is hot! Amen



God First: Haggai 1:14

So the Lord sparked the enthusiasm of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the enthusiasm of Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the enthusiasm of the whole remnant of God's people. They began to work on the house of their God, the Lord of Heaven's Armies. -NLT

God's message through Haggai sparked the enthusiasm of the whole people who heard it. God's word is powerful and when the time is right His Word is heard. These people had a history with God. They grew up hearing the great stories of His amazing miracles and provision. Some had even seen, with their own eyes, the power He carried with just a word or a motion. God had power and they knew it was time to listen or there would be consequences even greater than what they had previously experienced. God's word not only sparked their enthusiasm to obey and begin working on the Temple it also reminded them of His great place in their life and the fear they once had of Him returned. It wasn't just a fear of getting punished or judged, but an awe struck feeling to know that He ruled their hearts and creation.

I will give them hearts that recognize me as the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me whole heartedly. -Jeremiah 24:7 NLT

And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.
-Ezekiel 36:26-27 NLT

This same God rules our hearts, as well. He has power over our thoughts if we allow Him in. He can soften our hearts if we invite the thought. He can give us His Spirit to guide and direct our minds and actions if we abide in Him. All of God's power is ours to access if we choose to live God first. He can change our lives if we let Him! We don't have to be perfect as we choose this road and all our yuck doesn't have to be fixed right away. We just have to be clay in His hands. There comes a time when God has to be able to mold us and sculpt us and we have to hand over control in order for Him to do so. In order for the results to have a positive impact on us we must let God change us and move us in His perfect time and place.

Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.
-Psalm 51:10 NLT



Are you open to God changing your heart?

Your heart may not be hard and stubborn but is your spirit ready to obey?

Do you fear the Lord?

Are you in awe of God and His mighty power in your life?



God First: Radical Change

Haggai delivered the LORD's message to the people on August 29 and within 24 days, the people heard and obeyed the message. This is the kind of service that honors God; it's the radical obedience he is looking for from his disciples. His people did not sit around for days, weeks, or months talking about and wondering about how the temple would be rebuilt. They knew what God had asked of them and they got busy!

When Jesus was searching for his original 12 disciples, he sought disciples who were willing to put aside everything else and follow him. Here is the account of Andrew and Peter as they were called to discipleship,

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. -Matthew 4:18-20

Matthew's response to the call of Christ goes like this,

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.
-Matthew 9:9

Jesus revealed himself to Peter and Andrew and AT ONCE they left their fishing career and followed him. At once signifies without hesitation or fear of what they were leaving behind. Matthew left his position as tax collector, a shady and despised career, and followed Jesus. These men responded immediately. Do you have this same kind of response when Christ calls you to act?

I know that my honest response would have to be, "Not always." It is so easy to finish a task on the 'to do' list before I respond to what is being asked of me. It's tempting to want all of the details before we step out in faith. When my family was going through a very difficult time, I felt led to write my story. However, I mistakenly thought that surely God would want the 'mess' of life cleaned up before he would want me to take time away for myself to write, but as I've learned through Haggai and the calling of the disciples, opposition should not have kept me from doing what God was asking.



18 When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. 19 Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." 20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." 21 Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead."

-Matthew 8:18-22

Waiting for the "right time" isn't what God asks when He calls us. It isn't our job to decide when or even what obedience should look like. Our only job is to listen and obey. God will work out the details. He promises to be with us and help us. His power can do way more than we give Him credit sometimes.

What is God asking of you?

What is holding you back from obeying?

Radical change takes courage.....do you have what it takes to get uncomfortable and do what is right instead of what seems right in your situation?



God First: The Obedience of One

It took one person to say yes to God and a whole city of people was saved. Haggai's message encouraged people to turn back to God. Through his obedience the people chose to take action and set their priorities in order. His message was difficult to share with a people who had suffered and who were struggling to get their lives back in order. He could have easily decided to turn around and ignore God's call but he didn't. His decision changed the lives of many. The obedience of one man influenced a nation and led them back to God.

What would happen if you decided to share what was on your heart? How could you influence your family or maybe a community? How could your obedience change a city or nation? God may be telling you to share a difficult message, like Haggai. There may be an issue at your church or within your friend group that needs discussed. It may be time to stand up at your local town meeting and fight for what is right. Whatever the case may be, God will be with you. Maybe your family has gotten off track with God and it's time to reign them in. It's time to declare some very important messages that have lasting impacts on the people you love. They may not be interested in what you say, they may not be thankful for the message you share, but if God is calling you then it is time to obey.

The obedience of just one person can change the hearts of many. Your job isn't to change their hearts, only God can do that. Your only job is to boldly proclaim what God has laid on your heart.

Here are just a few examples of those who obeyed God and changed lives forever:

Noah did everything God commanded. -Genesis 6:22 GNT

So Joseph woke up, he married Mary, as the angel of the Lord had told him to.
-Matthew 1:24 GNT

The Lord told the angel to put his sword away, and the angel obeyed.
-1 Chronicles 21:27 GNT

So Jonah obeyed the Lord and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to walk through it. -Jonah 3:3 GNT



In order to set us free from this present evil age, Christ gave himself for our sins, in obedience to the will of our God and Father.

-Galatians 1:4 GNT

Search for yourself the stories of Mary, David, The prophets and apostles, Abraham, Paul and the many others who chose to obey their call . Instead of running back to their comfort zones, they trusted God to help them in their obedience.

What have you said yes to lately?



God First: God is Calling

Even after they sin, God calls His people back. Even after their priorities have shifted, God desires His children to choose Him. Even when His children forget him and follow other gods, God doesn't walk away. We are the lucky ones! When we make poor choices and we decide that other things are more important than God, He waits for us. While He waits, He sends us encouragement and reminders of His love. He gives us direction toward the right path, and works on drawing us back to His presence. He is in the business of healing hearts and He won't pass up one opportunity to save us. It's time that we think on the things that we have learned this month and decide how to put what we learned into action. It's time to make changes in our schedules and in our hearts so that we become more God first and less me first. God is ready to heal your heart and help you put Him first. Obey His Word and follow His call.....say you will go! You won't be sorry!

"My wayward children," says the Lord, "come back to me, and I will heal your wayward hearts." "Yes, we're coming," the people reply, "for you are the Lord our God."
-Jeremiah 3:22 NLT

Take action now! Write out a contract with God and commit to keeping Him first in your life. Pray about finding an accountability partner to share with and encourage. (Don't hesitate in asking him or her.) Put God on your calendar. And most importantly pray. Ask God to help you make this change in your life. Pour your heart out asking for forgiveness. Be honest with your struggles of why it's so hard for you to make this decision. Don't leave anything out as you hand over control. God will honor your desire to be close to Him and He will make a way for you. It may be difficult and there may be people in your life who don't understand, but don't give up. Stay focused on Him and His call on your life. Be open to the changes He has for you and your heart, and watch what He can do!

What one area of your life do you want to focus on changing?

What is one thing you can do today to make that change?

