

BECOMING PILLARS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

The Promise That Makes Any Project Possible

Haggai 1:12-15

Created by *Dale Ohmart*

Big Idea: *What God wants us to do with our lives is too immense for us to do by ourselves...so He promises to be our companion.*

When new trends begin developing in church life, I'm one of the first people that want to give it a try. That is obvious in the choices we make in music around here...I love to find new ways to express our praise and experience God's presence. I like to take some of the hymns that I grew up singing and arrange them in ways that help us escape the trap of routine and lead us to a fresh experience of the full power of the words we are singing.

But I reached my limit this past week when I read about some new arrangements of gospel hymns for today's churchgoers. Someone felt that the old lyrics of these hymns demanded a bit too much, leading to a sense of guilt and conviction. So they decided to make them more comfortable. This has required changes in some of the titles, for instance...

- *Onward, Christian Soldiers* has been transformed into *Onward, Social Workers* to reflect a more politically acceptable attitude.
- *Sweet Hour of Prayer* wasn't very sensitive to the tension we all feel about time, so it was changed to *Sweet Minute of Prayer*.
- *I Surrender All* was a bit too much to ask, so now people can sing *I Surrender Some*.
- *Blest Be The Tie That Binds* suggested that the relationship we should have with God and the church is a little too possessive for the 21st century, so it was changed to *Blest Be The Tie That Doesn't Cramp My Style*.¹

Of course, that collection of new hymns really doesn't exist. But how real is the spiritual apathy that it suggests?

Last week, we began a discussion about the writings of an Old Testament prophet named Haggai. As you may recall, I compared the circumstances that he and his neighbors were facing to the hurricane victims along the Gulf coast. In each situation, people were facing the need to rebuild their homes and their cities. Now, that is an important task. But then Haggai came along and demanded that they put an even higher priority on rebuilding the Temple of God Almighty. Our generation doesn't relate to God through a temple. Our generation relates to God through the church...through the process of being disciples and making disciples of Jesus Christ. Last week's lesson was all about God's expectation that we put our highest priority on that work.

¹ Adapted from *PreachingNow*, September 20, 2005 (vol. 4, no. 32). *PreachingNow* is a publication of American Ministry Resources and is edited by Dr. Michael Duduit. Copyright © 2004 by American Ministry Resources, LLC (Franklin, TN).

So what happens when that priority goes head to head with the spiritual apathy of our times? I mean, it sounds nice to think that we could focus our efforts on reaching out and expanding God's family. It's a pretty lofty dream. All of us get excited when we think about being a church where lives are changed every week and we see incredible examples of God at work. Then the alarm goes off and we wake up, right? As I'm talking about it, I wonder if you are feeling anything like the people of 1960 felt when John Kennedy announced the vision of putting a man on the moon. Great idea...but don't quite know how to do it. Maybe that's what you feel about the exciting but seemingly impossible idea of building your life around the work of God.

Well, at the end of **Haggai 1**, we find the promise that makes it possible for the dream to come true.

Haggai 1:12-15 (NLT²)

¹²Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of God's people obeyed the message from the LORD their God. It had been delivered by the prophet Haggai, whom the LORD their God had sent, and the people worshipped the LORD in earnest. ¹³Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave the people this message from the LORD: "I am with you, says the LORD!" ¹⁴So the LORD sparked the enthusiasm of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of God's people. They came and began their work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God. ¹⁵This was on September 21 of the second year of King Darius's reign.

Do you see the progression in these verses? When the leaders of God's people decided to obey God's call, He promised to be with them. And He "sparked" their enthusiasm for their work. Let's take a step back for a minute and examine a couple of facts that make this such an amazing promise.

1. Since the earliest pages of humanity's relationship with Him, God chooses to include us in work that He could do without us.

The Old Testament is filled with examples of this...Noah...Abraham...Moses...Joshua...one of the best known is certainly David's victory over Goliath. Does anybody here doubt that God could have executed Goliath without David's help? But God included a teenage shepherd boy in the task.

1 Samuel 17:45-47 (NLT)

⁴⁵David shouted in reply, "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD Almighty--the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶Today the LORD will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! ⁴⁷And everyone will know that the LORD does not need weapons to rescue his people. It is his battle, not ours. The LORD will give you to us!"

What an insight David had there! *The LORD doesn't need weapons...it is His battle.* God doesn't really need our help, but He chooses to include us. Did you ever have an experience like that in your life?

² Scriptures quotations followed by NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation (copyright©1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust). Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.

Every week, some of the younger kids try to pitch in and help us carry the equipment out to the trailer after our worship services here at the hotel. Of course, most of it is too heavy for them. But we try to give them stuff they can handle when they want to help. Why? Wouldn't it be easier and faster if the adults just did it all themselves? Well, maybe. But the point is that it's good for the kids to be included. And that's why God includes us in His work. He certainly could get it done without us. But three important things happen when He gives us the opportunity to be partners in His purpose:

- *God becomes more familiar to us.* You don't get acquainted very well with people you just watch do all the work. You get much better acquainted with the people who are working side-by-side with you.
- *We become more functional to God.* I believe that the victory over Goliath helped to shape David to become the king God wanted him to be as an adult.
- *God's true family is defined.* It's as simple as this...to know a person's true focus and identity, simply watch how they live.

Matthew 7:17-20 (NLT)

¹⁷A healthy tree produces good fruit, and an unhealthy tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. ¹⁹So every tree that does not produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Yes, the way to identify a tree or a person is by the kind of fruit that is produced.

God wants to bear His fruit in your life. He could achieve His purpose in this world without you, but He has invited you to become His partner.

2. And we need to make sure that we never forget that **this work can only be done if He is involved.**

In kind of a quirky way, that was one of the major themes of *Bruce Almighty* (Universal, 2003), that movie where Jim Carrey played the role of an ambitious news reporter who complained about how God was running the world. So God showed up (in the form of Morgan Freeman), and gave Jim Carrey divine powers. How's that for a frightening thought...Jim Carrey, omnipotent and running the world! Well, naturally, the job is too big. Ultimately, the situation starts spinning out of control and Jim's character realizes that God is better equipped to run the world than he is.

We might not express it so openly, but sometimes I think we sometimes fall into the trap of living as if we can make something of our lives without God. What is the result?

Recently, Richard Swenson of Christianity Today, International was talking about some of the emerging trends that may be reflecting an answer to that question.

- A guy who faked his obituary to get off the mailing list of *Harvard Journal*.
- A *Time* magazine article talks about a kid who "burned out" at age 9.
- A busy mother invented a "five day diaper" that supposedly saves her nine hours each week.

He concludes his examples by holding up a copy of *Newsweek* from a few years back. The cover displays the face of the president of Harvard University, and the word "EXHAUSTED" is printed in giant letters. It questions the possibility that in spite of all our modern advantages (education, affluence, time-saving

technologies, other conveniences, etc.), “people are hitting the wall and collapsing.” And the interesting thing is that all the futurists over the past few decades were expecting our generation to be suffering from BOREDOM.³

Are we trying to do too much? Could it be that we either consciously or unconsciously have begun to ignore the partnership God wants to have with us, leaving a gaping hole that we fill with more and more activity in a vain attempt to find significance?

John 15:4-8 (CEV⁴)

⁴*Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit unless it stays joined to the vine, you cannot produce fruit unless you stay joined to me.*

⁵*I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you cannot do anything without me. ⁶If you don't stay joined to me, you will be thrown away. You will be like dry branches that are gathered up and burned in a fire. ⁷Stay joined to me and let my teachings become part of you. Then you can pray for whatever you want, and your prayer will be answered.*

⁸*When you become fruitful disciples of mine, my Father will be honored.*

When Connie Holman heard her two-year-old daughter cry out for help in their Clearwater, FL home, her heart stopped and she dashed in to the rescue. She found a little girl trying to get dressed, but tied up because one arm was stuck through the neck hole of her blouse. At first, the toddler wouldn't let go of the shirt and all she would do was shout. When she finally let go and started cooperating with her mother, things went a lot better.⁵

Our lives accomplish a lot more when we start cooperating with God and His purpose. And it's very clear where our focus needs to be.

Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT)

¹⁸*Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Andrew Murray (of Christianity Today, International) suggests that, “In creating man with a free will and making him a partner in the rule of the earth, God limited himself. He made himself dependent on what man would do.”⁶ How freely can God work through your life? The choice to cooperate with Him is the most sincere form of worship we could ever offer.

³ Adapted from a video lecture, “Overcoming Overload: Signs of the Times.” Copyright © 2005 by Christianity Today, International & Christian Conferencing Network, copied from www.PreachingToday.com.

⁴ Scriptures marked as CEV are taken from the *Contemporary English Version*. Copyright © 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

⁵ Connie Holman, Clearwater, FL. Today's Christian Woman, “Heart to Heart.” Copied from www.PreachingToday.com, copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com and Christianity Today, International.

⁶ Andrew Murray in *Everyday with Andrew Murray*. Christianity Today, Vol. 31, no. 4. Copied from www.PreachingToday.com, copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com and Christianity Today, International.

3. What may not be quite so clear to you right now is how God is going to use you, and for each of us the answer to that question is going to be different. But maybe the most exciting thing I have to share with you today is that **when we respond to His invitation, He shapes us so we can complete His purpose.**

Haggai 1:13-14 is one more example of how God responds when people give Him access to their hearts. In the New Testament, a writer named Paul said it like this...

1 Corinthians 15:10 (NIV)

¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Kevin Bradley would have never dreamed what his life would look like. As a successful stockbroker from Baltimore, he lived in the fast-paced, big-money world of Wall Street and he was comfortable. But then God started doing something in his heart. Kevin began to notice the homeless people along the route to his office. An article by author Randy Bishop⁷ describes how he gradually got into the habit of taking breakfast to some of them and listening to the story of their lives. He said, "I got really interested in who they were and how they got to where they were."

It wasn't anything he had planned to do, but eventually Kevin and his wife, Marilyn, opened a mission to the homeless. He quit his job and they started a non-profit foundation dedicated to helping people on the streets become independent citizens. Kevin & Marilyn met emergency needs and started mentoring men and women through a program designed to help them discover their God-given talents that could be nurtured into productive careers.

The article describes that there were some tough years in the beginning, when fund-raising brought in less than \$10,000 a year. But they stayed with it and by 2001 had recruited enough financial backers to establish a growing ministry in Bel Air, MD and share their program with other organizations through America.

Have you discovered what God wants to do with your life yet? Or have you fallen into the trap that Haggai's neighbors were in...targeting almost all your resources at your career and/or your comforts. There is so much more to our existence. The most significant and satisfying thing you could ever do is to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ and strategically focus as much effort as possible into recruiting other people to become part of His family. I can't tell you exactly what that might look like. You may become like Kevin Bradley and others that I have known who, like him, were called away from their jobs and the lives they had known. Or, you may continue at the job you have right now while God radically transforms the rest of your existence.

What I can tell you is that if you do not engage with His purpose, you are settling for less.

God's promise is that every person who chooses to accept His invitation and obey His call will have His power working in them. God promises that every person who becomes part of His family and helps to build His family will have His power working in them.

Are you willing to become part of His family? Are you willing to obey His call?

PRAYER – Dear Father, only you know what we could each be and what we could each do if we made the simple choice to be more intentional about our companionship with you. So often, we have chosen to be like a

⁷ Randy Bishop, "From Wall Street to the Street," Christian Reader (Sep/Oct 2001), p.69. Copied from www.PreachingToday.com, copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com and Christianity Today, International.

man running through the airport, working twice as hard as we really have to, when a powered walkway is available to us just a few feet away. Show us the steps we need to take to start walking with Your power.