

Small Group Questions: June 26 – “Seek First God’s Kingdom”

Read Haggai 1:1-15

1. In our passage from Haggai, the remnant of Judah have been rebuilding and restarting their national and religious life back in Jerusalem after having just returned from Babylonian exile. We ourselves, in a much different way, have emerged from pandemic exile after some two years of being apart from one another and from the world we are called to serve. In what ways and what aspects are we now starting to "rebuild" as a society and as a church?

We've fairly recently opened up again as a society and after two years or so of restricted socialising, we are regaining our sense of being and belonging as a society and church. We are now called to rebuild relationships that have floundered, that have been destroyed, that were abandoned and forgotten. We are called to pick up again the pieces and responsibilities and tasks that were left behind. And we are also given the opportunity to leave behind what should have been left behind. We must then discern with wisdom and consider what kinds of service, ministries, mission opportunities, and acts of compassion we can take up again without being pulled into incredible busyness and without descending into complacency and apathy. The world we've emerged into remains the same: hurting, healing, and hungering for righteousness and justice. Let us return to our call for Gospel mission to the world.

2. Despite their circumstance of economic and political instability, the people of Jerusalem have been renovating their houses while the Temple lay in ruins. In what ways can we neglect the building of God's House and His kingdom on earth after some time apart and away from His mission and service?

After two years of lockdown, we can descend into becoming preoccupied with our own households and estates and not bother with others. Lockdown habituated us to mind our own business and to be separated from other people. Since this has been normalized for many months, we can excuse ourselves from service, from mission, from relationships, from generosity and hospitality, from engagement with others. In doing so, we neglect the kingdom of God "out there" as we get preoccupied with our own plans, vacations, investments, renovations, and families. Yes, God's kingdom breaks forth within ourselves and in our own households. And we must see to it that we are responsible and attentive to our own and our family's needs. But we must not neglect the House of God "out there".

3. The Spirit of God revives the spirits of the citizens and leaders of Jerusalem to begin rebuilding the Temple, and God encourages them along the way of their work: "I am with you, declares the Lord." How can we be in tune with the work of the Spirit in our lives and how can we spur one another towards the work of God's kingdom?

We must be in all things prayerful and be in constant and vigilant awareness that we cannot do and accomplish anything apart from the Spirit's power. It is a matter of awareness and conscious living into the power of God's Spirit. In everything that we

do, say, and pray, let us be asking for God's strength, wisdom, and character to perform and fulfill as we ought. And from this, let us check in with each other, keeping one another accountable, asking of each other hard questions, giving each other words of generous compassion and grace, spoken in love and forgiveness, and being together for the work of mission rather than doing everything on our own or just as individuals. Getting to do something worthwhile is a way better experience when we do it with other like-minded people. Let us then press into the work of rebuilding with other Christians and families as we are together praying and asking God for strength to commit to the task.

4. In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus taught His followers to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, and God will take care of the rest for us. What does it look like to obey Jesus' command to seek the kingdom first and to believe His words that God will take care of the rest for us?

This will be a lifelong endeavour and attitude, to not make decisions and choices out of fear, fret, and worry; but to always come before God in prayer for all things, out of thanksgiving and gratitude. We keep praying daily for a mind that is being renewed and not to be conformed to the patterns of this world.