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Take Courage and Work!



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"Take courage and work, for I am with you, says the LORD Almighty."

(Haggai 2:4, NLT)

It was a great beginning. There was a burst of enthusiasm for God' work, fired by renewed commitment to obeying God's word and honoring God's presence at the very center of their community and their individual lives. Community leaders, religious leaders, and the entire population rallied around a grand cause, set aside their personal agendas, and united in a work too big for any one person or any single segment of their community to tackle alone.

There was a promise of long hoped-for restoration, of once again making things right, of realizing the cherished vision of a right and just society.

But after only three short weeks, the vision had dimmed and enthusiasm had waned. Rebuilding a temple was an enormous task to take on, especially during a time of year when a busy holiday season complicated just keeping up with the everyday business of life. What's more, there was the growing, nagging sense of defeat, the question of whether the goal was attainable after all. A few could recall the glory of the temple of old, and there was little hope that the structure they endeavored to build could come close to measuring up to what once was. The task was monumental, the resources were few, the resistance was strong, the resolve was weakening. Into that scene stepped the prophet Haggai, with the word of the LORD . . . "take courage and work, **for I am with you**, says the LORD."

God calls, we respond to the call. Often with excitement and enthusiasm, with a grand vision that motivates and energizes us. And the work proves to be hard. There is seemingly more to do than time to do it. We are confronted by those who would thwart our progress, for it challenges their personal interests. Moreover, the task just seems so big . . . "on earth as it is in heaven" – is that really possible? Can anything I do really contribute to making that happen?

The word of the LORD comes to us, as it always does to those called to follow God in mission. That mission may engage us in ministry in the close circle of immediate family, in the larger field of our neighborhood or community, in our local church, or even across cultural or national boundaries. Wherever and however we respond to the call in faith, service, and community, we don't go alone or by our own strength.

For God's promise to his responsive people is steadfast and sure . . .

- *"Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9, NLT)*
- *"Don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." (Isaiah 41:10, NLT)*
- *"Go and make disciples of all the nations . . . And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 18:19-20, NLT)*

The first of January is often a day of renewed spirit and fresh resolve. We determine to start again, to recalibrate, to set a new course. On the second of January, and in all the days of 2018 that follow, may we all find empowerment and the strength to sustain our energies and efforts not in ourselves, not in our circumstances or our hopes and dreams, not in any perceived success or accomplishment, but in the promise of God's presence. *"Take courage and work, for I am with you, says the LORD Almighty."*