

Walking Through the Veil II: From Core to Courtyard

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. Go up to the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored", says the Lord. – Haggai 1:7-8

Living on Good Intentions

Israel had been in bondage in Babylon and Persia. By God's hand, under the orders of Cyrus, King of Persia, Israel was allowed to go back to Israel:

This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them." – Ezra 1:2-3

Israel went with this instruction, and began to build, but before they could get anywhere with it were pressured into stopping by external forces. The pressure was so strong that it would be 16 years before they got back to the work. In that time, Israelites continued to live in the land unhindered. They worked, raised families, and never had to go back to Persia. They were, in fact, free, but something was still missing. They were not experiencing the blessing they expected as the people of God. Why? Because their purpose for returning to Jerusalem had been left undone and untended: the temple had not been rebuilt.

Some Israelites were close enough to see it on a daily basis; others probably never had to see it at all. They knew what the regulations were for going to the temple and giving offerings, but for them, other things took precedence.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "These people say, "The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house." – Haggai 1:2

Israel had *every intention* of returning to the work, but those intentions never became tangible. Whether they were waiting for a change in government, new inspiration, or a word from the Lord, they felt justified in spending time and effort on their own life and lifestyle, while allowing the central figure of their nation to lie in waste.

Stop: What is one thing you have intended to do this year, but haven't started, or haven't been consistent in? Get out your calendar and schedule that event for the first available week, and do not take no for an answer. Place reminders in your calendar so you have no excuse. Do not schedule it too far out so you remain in intention-mode. Make sure your goal is short term and attainable.

God's Focus: What is Important To Him

Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin? Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: give careful thought to your ways." Haggai 1:3-5

God was not saying that their paneled houses or their lifestyle was a problem per se. Rather, he was saying that their focus was an issue: When they should have been focusing on the place of God in their lives, they 1) neglected the place of God, and 2) placed their time, attention and resources into other things. God wanted to bring Israel back to their purpose in him, not just for ministry, but also for relationship. He was not looking for them to give up their houses, but to **dedicate** time, priority and resources to the place he was to have in their lives. Jesus, in speaking to the Pharisees and teachers of the law had this to say:

Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former. – Matthew 23:23

The religious leaders were so intent on external signs of righteousness that they would literally count out blades of dill or measure out grains of spice so people could see how dedicated they were to the tithe, all the while letting other areas of their lives go untended. Jesus told them that they needed to spend their time and effort, **practicing** the more important areas, while making sure the other areas were not neglected. **It was all a matter of priority:** First things needed to come first, and everything else would fall into place after that:

*But seek **first** his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. – Matthew 6:33*

For God, this was of primary importance. So much so that he pushed other things aside for Israel to recognize where their focus was to be:

You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why? Declares the Lord Almighty. Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. – Haggai 1:9

God was serious about his house, and wanted Israel to be serious about it as well. As we consider the place of God's house in our lives, we need to see God's definition of his house under Jesus:

*But Christ is faithful as the son over God's house. **And we are his house, if indeed we hold on to our courage and the hope in which we boast.** – Hebrews 3:6*

We are God's house – his dwelling place, and he takes great care to ensure that his dwelling place is a place that will bring him pleasure, and one in which he can glory.

Stop: Look at an area in which you do well. Why do you do well in that area? How detailed and dedicated are you to that area? Look at an area in which you are not doing well. While not neglecting the former, practice the area you need work in for a period of time to establish a new habit. Schedule this in your calendar with reminders.

Helpful tips on how to establish new habits: <http://zenhabits.net/how-to-establish-new-habits-the-no-sweat-way/>

How God Builds a House

Since we are God's house, we can see the construction of the temple as an example of the methods and priority God uses in building our lives – and that we should take in constructing our lives before God.

The Order

Element	Scripture Reference
Ark of the Covenant / Mercy Seat	Exodus 25:10-22
Table with Bread of Presence	Exodus 25:23-30
Lampstand / Lamps	Exodus 25:31-40
Tabernacle	Exodus 26:1-30
Veil (separating most holy from holy)	Exodus 26:31-35
Tent Entrance (separating holy from common)	Exodus 26:36-37
Altar	Exodus 27:1-8
Courtyard	Exodus 27:9-18

Notice that God started from the inside and worked his way out:

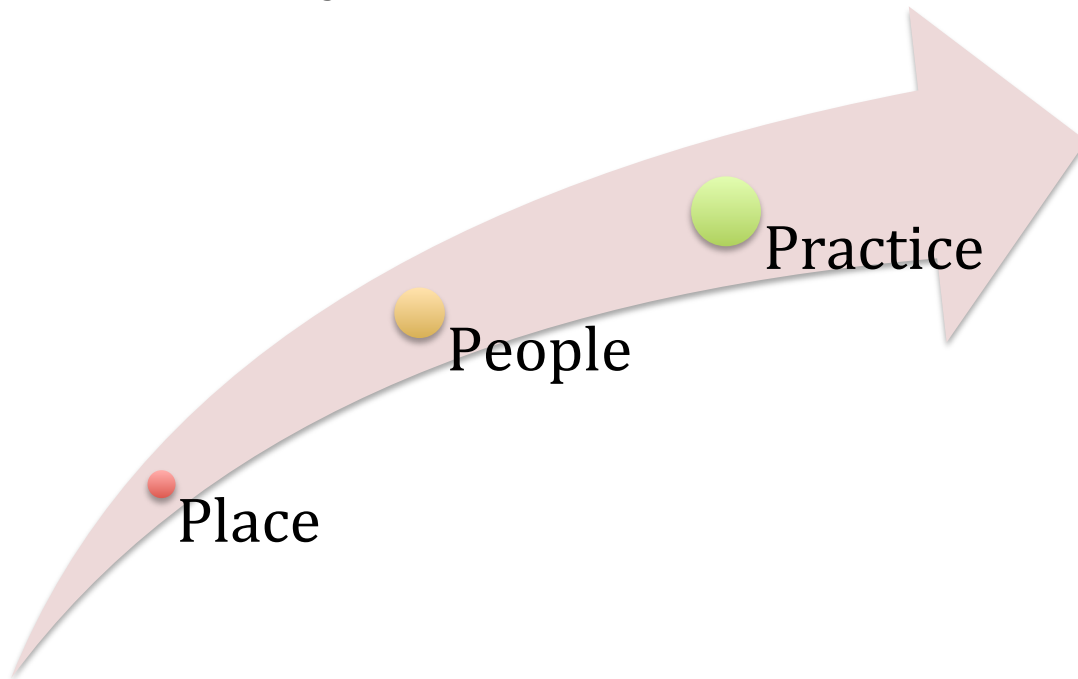
Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. – Matthew 12:33

Instead of focusing on fixing the externals, God wanted to work on the core first. **Everything else was dependent upon the core being established.** The courtyard and altar would have no meaning if there was no mercy seat for the blood of redemption to be sprinkled upon. Stars operate under a delicate balance of fusion at the core that pushes energy out, and gravity surrounding the star that pushes energy in. If the core “runs out of fuel”, it stops pushing energy out, and as a result the star begins to implode. Israel was in the process of implosion before God, which is why he was so drastic in his measures to get them back to the core – to building from the inside out.

The Structure

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. – John 14:1-3

God's structure in building is:



He established the building first (Exodus 25:1 – 27:18). Then he put people (the priests) into that building (Exodus 28:1 – 29:30). Then he established the practices (ministry) for the people (Exodus 29:31 – 30:37). Note, that, first, the place has to be established before those serving or taking part can inhabit it. So it is with us – God wants to **establish us** before he establishes other's place in our lives. In addition, the "practice" or what we would refer to as "ministry" could not take the place of or precede the establishment of the building.

Stop: Take note of how much time you spend in "service" to the Lord, vs. how much time you spend "building His dwelling place" (aka, You). What comes first? In the areas where external things, or service comes first, purposely reverse it for one week.

What God Emphasizes

Moses spent time with God on the mountain – 40 days to be exact. In that time, God showed him the pattern of the heavenly tabernacle. When he came down from the mountain, not only did he have a vision of what to build, God continued to give him explicit instruction on how to build it, to ensure that it was to God's exact specification. God didn't stop there though – He repeated one thing to Moses, so that

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Moses would not forget his direction: ***make this according to the pattern you saw in the mount.*** As God was giving Moses instructions over the various parts of the tabernacle, he threw in the reminder:

- Exodus 25:9 – Make this tabernacle and all its furnishing exactly like the pattern I will show you.
- Exodus 25:40 – See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.
- Exodus 26:30 – Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain.
- Exodus 27:8 – Make the altar hollow, out of boards. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain.

God did not want Moses to just be “inspired to build” and then go off on his own to build what he thought would be acceptable to God. God wanted Moses to stay in tune with him, building a dwelling place that **God could take pleasure in**, so he had to keep him reminded of his instruction.

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. – Hebrews 2:1

Stop: Take one word/direction you have received from the Lord. Repeat it to yourself daily for one week as a reminder of what you are to do. Place it as a reminder in your calendar so that you see it and repeat it daily. *What is the result after one week? How solid is that word in your mind and heart?*

Other ways to solidify his word: get flashcards and carry one with you every day. Schedule time to look at it, repeat it, pray over it and practice it. Do this until you are ready for the next one. Also look in your App Store for memorization apps. Finally, journal things you have received, and routinely go back to review those words/instructions.

God's Motivation

There were two elements that were critical to the structure of God's tabernacle: The veil and the curtain to the tent. They were important because they separated the different sections of the tabernacle into 3:

- The Holy of Holies, or The Most Holy Place
- The Holy Place
- The Outer Court (Courtyard)

These sections relate to God's motivation for us, and what our motivation should be in all things, as seen in the 2 greatest commandments:

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Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." – Matthew 22:37-39

In these two commandments, love was to be directed to 3 areas:

1. To God, as primary
2. To self, as the basis for others
3. To others with the same degree as self

God's construction of his temple gave his people the opportunity to see how God relates to us individually, to us in community, and to us in the world.