

## Pursuing God: the Hand of God

### Ezra 1:1

**MPS** God works to accomplish His Will by calling people to follow by faith for the glory of His great Name.

**OBJ** Every person can trust to obey God by recognizing the work of His hand by Four Indicators.

**INTRO** Have you ever thought about how many “indicators” are active in our daily life? An indicator is something that indicates the state or level of something; it points to something else, whether an alert to caution or danger or something that is of greater value or importance. Far too often, indicators are something to dread, like lights on car’s dashboard. But some are common, like the “red dot notifications” many of you collect on your phone! I found an article this week that offered the top four indicators of a long life. These are 1) grip strength, 2) sitting to rise, with a point for each part of bodied required to rise, 3) walking speed, and 4) purpose. If sitting to rise is a true indication, I may not make it to 2023.

Today we consider Pursuing God by looking at the hand of God at work in the world. When I say the “hand” of God, I refer His work, power, might and strength. Too often when we think of God’s hand at work, we have a very distorted view of what is meant. Scripture provides a great advantage to see God’s hand at work by telling us what He is doing. Today, we do not always know whether some particular act is God’s work or otherwise. However, there are indicators that point us to God, ways we can be confident God is working.

### READ Ezra 1:1-11

*In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:*

*<sup>2</sup>“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup>Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”*

*<sup>5</sup>Then rose up the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. <sup>7</sup>Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. <sup>8</sup>Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. <sup>9</sup>And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, <sup>10</sup>30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels; <sup>11</sup>all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem. **Ezra 1:1-11***

**Ezra begins his record by revealing the hand of God at work.** He records that Cyrus makes a proclamation that all the people may return to Jerusalem to build a temple for worship. Their return will receive aid. Then, he records that those who rose up to return were aided by gifts and offerings from others, including a precise record of vessels for the house of the Lord. But this work was not simply another decree of the king or only the good fortune of people. Rather, Ezra records that God “*stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia*” to make his proclamation, verse one(.1). The decree of the king was the hand of God. Then, in verse five(.5) he states that the people who rose to go were “*everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up*”. The people who returned was also the hand of God at work. This is not the first time for us to see (read of) God working in this way. God stirred and moved the heart of Pharaoh too, though in a different direction. <sup>Exodus9:12</sup> Ezra surely



reflects this in his record as well. He makes clear that he did not believe this was only the King or the people.<sup>1</sup> [Ezra points the reader to know from the very beginning that this great work was the hand of God.](#)

**God works to accomplish His Will by calling people to follow by faith for the glory of His great Name.**

**God is at work!** Ezra is the spiritual leader of the people that continually points them to God. He points the reader to look beyond circumstances or happenstance to see God at work. **But what are we to take from this, reading in the Scriptures what we do not, because we cannot, see in everyday life? Does God still work in this way?** We confidently say “Yes” This was not a one-time occurrence. God works through earthly rulers to accomplish His will. Proverbs 21:1 states: “*A king’s heart is like streams of water in the Lord’s hand: He directs it wherever He chooses.*” And God works in the hearts and lives of His people to accomplish His will for His pleasure.<sup>Phil2:13</sup> We may not see God’s hand at work the way we read it in Ezra, but we know that He is working and are called to follow him by faith.

**OBJ Four Indicators help us recognize God’s hand at work calling us to follow Him by faith.**

**Indicator #1:** God works by stirring our heart to lead us to worship Jesus.

All God’s work in Cyrus and the people was to lead to worship. Ezra states that his record is the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy. This prophecy is about God bringing His people back from exile to fulfill His covenant and worship Him. [Ezra’s record is not about a building or a wall, but about God working to draw people in faith to worship the glory of His Name.](#)

The work of God’s hand moves the spirit and captures the heart before convincing the mind. We know that God’s purpose is ‘glory through worship’ because He created us as worshipping creatures. [The one whose heart is not captured by the work of God’s hand will never have his mind convinced that it is God’s hand working.](#) The Psalmist writes,

*“For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.”* **Psalm 92.4**

**Gladness is a work in the heart for the mind.** We are created for and captured by God to behold his glory and worship. Those who know God are called to see the hand of God at work in all of creation. **Psalm 8.3** declares, “*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?*” When I see God’s work, and especially when by eyes of faith, I may not fully comprehend or understand, but I can’t help but worship!” God reveals himself not to ‘wow us’ in amusement, but to ‘awe us in worship’. If you “look” to be entertained, you may or may not be impressed. But if you pursue God to worship, He reveals and invites to enter in. Ask yourself, **“Am I longing to worship or looking to be ‘wowed’?”** [Anything and everything that stirs the heart to think upon and respond to Jesus is the hand of God at work, no matter where it seemed to begin.](#) [God’s hand at work first leads us to do what we were created to do, worship!](#)

**Indicator #2:** God works to strengthen our relationship; in knowledge by revelation and obedience by faith. Ezra points to Jeremiah’s prophecy as a reminder of God’s promise being fulfilled, to teach us Who God is and why we can trust Him. He sets Cyrus’ decree within the context of Jeremiah’s prophecy to accomplish two goals; to show God’s sovereignty over the rulers of this world, and to call His people to their role of trust and join Him in His work. There would be plenty who would hear and not heed for any number of reasons. But those who hear and heed would have their hearts stirred<sup>5</sup> by the remembrance of God’s Word, because their hope rested in God, to respond in faith.

**God reveals Himself that we might know Him.** But knowledge of God does not culminate only in intellect. God’s Truth revealed in His Word is living in the person of Jesus Christ. [True knowledge of God is relationship.](#) Therefore, knowledge of

<sup>1</sup> J. G. McConville, [Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther](#), The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 9. McConville states, “On the one hand he had to depict the power of God over the nations and especially in the salvation of Judah. On the other hand the author of Ezra has to guard against complacency on the part of those for whom he writes. If he slips into triumphalism he may give the impression that the return from exile is God’s final act, ushering in a Messianic age in which the people of Judah enjoy pre-eminence in the world and even the servitude of the nations (Isa. 60:10).”



God in truth and love permeates the heart to strengthen us by faith to obey and live out from the source of His working presence within. Philippians 2:12-13 declares this: *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* God’s work within that motivates to lead us in obedience is transforming us as it directs us to serve His Kingdom mission with our whole lives.

**ILLUS** We see this in the Scripture with the Indicatives and Imperatives. Indicatives are the truths of our being and identity in Jesus Christ. Imperatives are the commands to obey. These are never individually wrapped. Maybe the greatest example is Ephesians 2:10: *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* **Every indicative leads to an imperative, and every imperative flows from an indicative.**

This is relationship with God; He reveals Himself to strengthen our faith for obedience. When we follow as He leads, we see God at work, we learn how He works, come to understand His work (at least in part) and become like Him in his work. God works, Christian, that you might know that you know the One you know, so you walk in full confidence in obedience by faith. **Pursuing God means every act of faith in obedience to God expands and deepens our knowledge of Him by proving His greater faithfulness, to strengthen our faith for greater glory.**

**APPL** Pursuing God leads a Christian to ask of self: **“Does hearing God’s Word motivate me to trust and obey?”**

**Indicator #3:** God works to lead His people to demonstrate the glory of Jesus to all nations.

Ezra records God’s call to His people, to trust and demonstrate His glory to all nations by obedience. He identifies those who returned as “Exiles”(Gola).<sup>1:11</sup> This is more than a label. What began as a reality of their state of being now becomes an identity of God’s people in how to live in the world. This identity reminds: God has not forgotten nor forsaken us but calls us to join Him in His work. They were away from their homeland, but not forgotten by the Lord and Savior; removed from the place of their birth, but not forsaken by the One who called them out to make them a nation; removed from the place of worship but never separated from the One who is worthy of their worship. Exiles following God to rebuild would never be about brick and mortar but declaring the glory of the One who was worthy of their whole lives. **God came as the ‘first missionary’<sup>Gen3;John1:14</sup>, and calls His people to follow Him in revealing the glory of Jesus’ name to the nations of this world by the way we trust to obey Him in this world.**

**Christian, exile forms our identity today as we await our eternal home.** We are not lost, forsaken, nor forgotten! We are where God has placed us for this time and His work! We know the One who has called us is sovereign over all power and authority in this world. He loves us and leads us to live to glorify His Name before all nations on the earth. Pursing God means the question for each of us now becomes NOT **“When will God move the heart of our ruler / leader?”**, but **“When will our heart be moved by God to trust and obey Him, to live to declare His glory among all the peoples of the world?”**

**Indicator #4:** God works to strengthen our affections and deepen our abandon to obey Him.

Ezra’s first chapter introduces us to God’s work in His day. The purpose of understanding God’s providence is not so He can make everything work to our liking, but that in all things He is working for our holiness by His righteousness to declare His glory. As He stirs and leads and we follow, our affections strengthen and convictions deepen. God is not after our surface trust that obeys when all is good. The hand of God is working FOR those who trust Him in all.<sup>Gen50.20;Rom8.28</sup> This is fundamental to our understanding of God. **If you pursue God without believing or only casually trusting this, every challenge to your faith will cause you to question God instead of bowing down in worship to trust him.** You do not have to beg God to work. You must only behold that He is. The Psalmist reminds us (138:8): *“The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.”* In pursuing God, we must ask **“Are my affections and convictions in Jesus strengthening and deepening my obedience to Him for His glory in me?”**

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God is calling each of us to pursue Him in greater ways; understanding, trust, service, sacrifice, etc. You are not alone. His hand is working, calling you to join him. **Have you paused to recognize and acknowledge the work of God today? Are the indicators of life pointing you to look to see God at work today, to look to Jesus and follow Him by faith?**

