



Tim Sanders, former Chief Solutions Officer at Yahoo shares this about establishing priorities: Take your life and all the things you think are important, and put them in one of three categories that are represented by three items: glass, metal, and rubber.

First, things made of rubber. When you drop them, they'll bounce back. Nothing is really lost when they get dropped. So, for instance, if your team loses a football game, your life will bounce back fine. It doesn't change anything; nothing is lost. It won't altar your marriage or spiritual life. Life goes on.

Second, things made of metal. When they get dropped, it creates lots of noise, but you can recover from the drop. You miss a meeting at work, you're in trouble but it's not a disaster. You bounce a check or two that creates some noise in your life, but you can recover from it.

Then there are things made of glass. When you drop one of these, it shatters into pieces. You might piece it back together, but it's never the same. The consequences of it being broken will forever affect how it's used.

The thing is, each of us make choices about what those things are we can't afford to drop. Is it your marriage, your family, your friends, your job? How about your relationship with God and what He wants for you?

Today we come to the book of Haggai. Haggai was a prophet who tried to get God's people to see they were confusing things in their life. Rubber and metal were being confused with glass. They lost sight of the really important things.

Haggai called Judah to finish the job of rebuilding the temple.

Let me give you some background. Solomon the son of David was the third king of Israel. His greatest accomplishment was to build a temple for God. It was built to communicate God's majesty, power, and glory. The temple invited God to live in their midst. And He did. For a time, they were complete: they lived in the land given by God, blessed with the very presence of God among them.

But Solomon's son Rehoboam made an unwise decision that split the kingdom: two nations—Israel and Judah—each with their own king. Successive kings often made matters worse. Their disobedience eventually caught up with them. First the northern kingdom was overtaken by Assyria. Years later, the Babylonians conquered Judah. The Jerusalem temple that once

celebrated the awesome presence of God was leveled and God's people were taken into exile. Israel remained the people of God, but they'd lost every tangible reminder of their identity.

Seventy years went by. During that time the Babylonians were overtaken by the Persians. But just as God had promised, He raised someone up to help them—the Persian king, Cyrus. He released the Jews to return to their land. A remnant of about 50,000 Jews left Persia for Jerusalem. Cyrus even gave them permission to rebuild their temple. They built the altar first so sacrifices could resume. But then they met with some opposition, and eventually got distracted and stopped working. About 15 years went by. The foundation of the temple was laid, the altar was built, but it was covered with weeds. God's people just gave up and went on with life.

So God chose a man to deliver a message to them, to remind them of the importance of finishing what they started. Haggai was the man. God gave him four messages to motivate them to get back to work. He preached over just a few months during the year 520 BC.

The book of Haggai is about finishing the temple. That's why it often gets preached at the start of church building programs. But that's not the real issue. Why was the temple of God so important? It was just a building. We know God is bigger than a building. But the temple was the physical, visible manifestation of God's presence. It made God's reality and presence known in a unique and powerful way. That's not to say God wasn't present everywhere, but He was uniquely present in the temple. That's why the temple was so important. In a way, it was made of glass.

For us, today, the temple points to the same reality, but it's different. We're people of the New Covenant, not the old. In the New Testament Jesus referred to Himself as the temple (Jn 2:18-22). Jesus, walking around as a man, fully God but fully human, was the temple of God—the visible manifestation of God's presence. But, when Jesus ascended into heaven, did the presence of God leave with Him? No.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the individual believer and ultimately the church became the temple of God. We're the physical, visible manifestation of God's presence. The Spirit of God indwells the church and we make God real to each other and to the world. In the midst of a world that tempts us to forget He's with us, we remind each other of that. In the midst of a world that rejects Him, we bear witness of His grace. We're the

visible manifestation of God's presence to each other and the world.

So, what does this book have to do with us? It's directed at people who have lost sight of the most important thing: God and the work of building up His people. It's directed at people who focus too much of their attention on things made of metal and rubber, rather than the important things made of glass. For us this book is a kick in the pants. It's meant to spiritually stir us up. We're going to focus on chapter one where Haggai gives five ways we can do that.

By refusing to procrastinate

In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest: (v. 1).

The first day of the sixth month would have been Aug. 29, 520 B.C. Haggai's prophecy is directed towards two leaders: Zerubbabel is the civil leader. He was also the grandson of Jehoiachin, a former king of Judah. Joshua is the religious leader. He's the high priest so he'd be very concerned about the temple. You can also read about these guys in the book of Ezra. These two leaders were responsible to lead the people.

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house.'" (v. 2).

Throughout this book, God is referred to as "The Lord Almighty." Other translations say "the Lord of hosts." In that day, a king was never alone. He was always surrounded by his court and his military might. The king ruled, but the power of the king was dependent on his hosts. So this title has to do with God as King, surrounded in heaven by His heavenly court. The first thing the Lord does is quote what the people of Israel are saying. He calls them "these people" instead of "my people." That's a hint something is wrong; there's distance between them. The cause of the distance is their excuse the time hadn't come to rebuild the temple. This excuse was a roundabout accusation of the Lord—it was **his** fault things hadn't improved. They probably thought, "If God wanted us to finish the temple, he'd take care of all these problems. He'd smooth the way." Matthew Henry wrote, "It is bad enough to neglect our duty, but it is worse to vouch Providence for the patronizing of our neglects."

Notice also they weren't saying the temple shouldn't be rebuilt, but just that it wasn't the right time to do it. In essence, they put it off for another day. We call it procrastinating. You know, mañana. The mindset that we'll someday do it allows us to feel a little bit better about **not** doing it now. It's like my garage. In my old house we didn't have a garage. Now we have one. It's amazing how convenient it is to have a place to put all your junk. My wife told me this week she heard somewhere you were

supposed to put cars in a garage. I said, "Are you sure? I've never heard of that!" Mañana.

So the first thing we have to do if we're going to join with God in the work He's calling us to do is refuse to procrastinate; refuse to put it off for another time. Henry continues: "For the person who wills to do right, the time is always present; however we mortals are ingenious when we wish to hide our delinquencies." He's right: the time is always present. What are the things you know you should be doing but are putting off for another day?

Remember the two guys Jesus met? In Luke 9 Jesus says to one guy, "Follow me." The man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another guy said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." What's that about? Doing what God's called you to do, not tomorrow, today.

By setting our priorities

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?" (verses 3–4).

This leads to the second thing we'll have to do if we're going to join with God in His work: set our priorities. Gee, for some reason the time wasn't right to rebuild the temple, but it was right to remodel their homes? Go figure! How does that work? This is an issue of priorities. They'd clearly made their personal comfort a priority over the work of God. They invested more time, money and energy into their own homes than in God's home. By the way, in the book of Ezra it says about 15 years earlier after they built the altar money was given specifically for the purpose of importing cedar logs from Lebanon that would be used to build the temple. I can't help but wonder if they'd used those cedar logs to panel their own own homes rather than the house of God!

Our priorities are seen not so much in what we say but in hard choices we make every day. If I asked these people, "What's your first priority? Who's first in your life?" They'd all say "Well, of course, the Lord. Look here at my priority list: God, family, career and fun. Those are my priorities in order." But the real question is, how much time, how much money, how much thought, care and energy do you put into each one of these? Those are your priorities. I don't believe the point here is they shouldn't have paneled houses. Go ahead, panel your house, but don't put that before the Lord.

What are your priorities? I'm not asking what they should be, but what are they, really? What does your checkbook say about your priorities? Do you give the Lord what's left over, which is often very little, or do you give Him the first-fruits? This is hard. Some

of you are barely making it. But some of us **think** we're barely making it, when in fact we're choosing to put other things first. What does your weekly planner say about your priorities? Some of us have no problem missing the worship of God so we won't miss a 49er game. Some of us make sure our kids never miss a soccer match or a piano lesson but when it's all done there's little time for investing in their spiritual life. Some of us go to great lengths to develop our skills so we can advance our careers, but we have no idea what spiritual gifts God has given us so we can advance His kingdom. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness..." That means we look at our checkbook and our time commitments and put Him first in everything. And then we recruit a friend to ask us the hard questions and keep us accountable because we all fall off the wagon.

By examining our circumstances

Here's the third thing: we need to examine our circumstances. In v. 5 the Lord says, "*Give careful thought to your ways...*" This phrase is repeated four times in this book. He wants us to examine our lives. To do that we have to pause and take a close look at ourselves. He gets specific about this in the next verse.

"You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it" (v. 6).

You can see what their priorities were—basically earning a living. But God says even with all that effort, you're still not satisfied, are you? Your work isn't producing enough. Your food doesn't satisfy. Wine fails to provide an escape. Your clothes don't keep you warm. No matter how much money you make, you never have enough. All your efforts are in vain. But why? Why is this happening?

"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. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands" (verses 9–11).

God says, "I'm doing this. What you brought home, I blew away. I brought the drought; I withheld the dew. Why? Because my house is still a mess." So God has ways of getting our attention, doesn't He? This doesn't mean all hard things in our life can be attributed to our sin. We can't always know the specifics of why certain things happen to us, but at the very least we should ask ourselves, "God, are you trying to get my attention? What can I learn from this?" Sometimes we wonder why we're not getting ahead. We think of all the effort we're making, all the blood,

sweat and tears, but we seem to be going backward. God is saying through this, "Reexamine your life. You're not putting me first. You need to make some hard choices."

By getting involved in the Lord's work

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

Again, "give careful thought to your ways." Now He uses that to motivate them to get to work. This is the fourth thing: they needed to get their hands dirty with the Lord's work. He says, "Go up the mountains, chop down the trees, bring the logs and build my house!" So they'd have to stop what they were doing and invest time and energy in this project. There would no doubt be a step of faith in this. "Lord, you'll have to take care of my family and my business."

As the body of Christ we're God's temple. Eph 2:22 says, "*And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*" There are people around you today who the Holy Spirit intends to add to this dwelling. At home, at work and at play, are you sharing the love of Christ or are you a stumbling block? What's stopping you from being available to God to add living stones to this dwelling? Maybe you come to church and leave early and say, "I don't know anybody." If you come to church but aren't in a small group, you're not really functioning in the body. Listening to preaching but not being in community is like listening to lectures on how to play golf but never leaving your family room. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved other believers: Community Groups, WBS, Men's Fraternity, 20's, etc.

How about serving? Only a small part of ministry is done by pastors and staff. Serve with the gifts and talents God has given you, right where you are. He'll use you to accomplish something for eternity. Maybe you're thinking, "I can't get involved in ministry. I'm not ready to teach others. I don't know enough." Why is that? You probably know more than you think. What matters even more is you care. Our children would love to hear simple stories of what you've learned about God and what He's done in your life. Our Junior High and High School students need mentors.

You say, "I'm too busy." We all go through busy seasons. But is this a season or a lifestyle? Is this an excuse to have relationships on your own terms, not God's? Are you thinking, "I'm waiting until the perfect ministry opportunity comes along"? Don't wait, just go for it!

I love what God says here. He says to build this house "so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored." You see, it's not about the building, it's about bringing pleasure to God. It's about honoring Him. That's what it all comes down to. Do you want to

be involved in something that God takes pleasure in, something that honors Him?

By receiving God's enablement

Haggai has given us four ways to renew and rebuild our reality around God: by refusing to offer excuses, establishing priorities, carefully examining our circumstances and diving into God's work. How did the people respond?

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD (v. 12).

This is great. We've been studying the Minor Prophets for a while now and finally we see someone actually listened! The people obeyed. Did you notice why they obeyed? Because they believed God had sent Haggai and they feared the Lord. They believed what Haggai was saying came from God. Today, we have the word of God in the Bible. The Bible tells us what God wants and if we truly fear the Lord we'll obey as well. It's interesting, prior to this they feared the people around them. They feared all the opposition they faced. Most of the time that's what keeps us from obeying God—the fear of man. What will people say? What will people think? What will people do? But now they feared the Lord more than they feared people.

Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month (verses 13–15).

Something even more wonderful happens. On Sept. 21, 520 B.C., some 24 days after laying down the challenge, the Lord shows up and gives this word of encouragement, "I am with you." It's too bad we have ruined the word "with" today. It's like "Well, of course God is with me. He's always with me. Big deal." But "with" as it's used in the Bible means so much more. It means He's enabling us with His strong presence. It means our efforts aren't a solo performance but a team effort. It's like when we take one move towards the Lord, He gives us the ability to complete the task. He stirs our hearts just as He did with Zerubbabel and Joshua and all the people.

This is the fifth thing: you receive God's enablement. This is when serving the Lord becomes really fun and exciting. You sense His

presence. You see His hands all over what you're doing and you dive in even more. You have this sense you're being carried along by someone far greater than yourself—and you are!

When I think about this I can't help but think of the history of CPC. All along the way we've faced challenges and every time God's people have been stirred to step and meet the challenge. This church has been around for almost 45 years; not here in this building, but here in this area. We started with about five families from PBC who wanted to start a work here in San Mateo County. For almost 20 years we met in rented facilities at College of San Mateo, Hillsdale Inn, Foster City Community Center, Bowditch Middle School. We used to say "we dare you to find us." But God showed up and people came. God was building His church.

Then it came time for us to build. And over the course of the last 25 years we've built this building in three separate stages. Each time we faced a challenge and each time God's people stepped up and have been stirred to meet that challenge. We started with just our offices, and then we built our Multipurpose Room where we met for worship for over 10 years, and then we built our parking garage and this auditorium. Believe it or not, this is our ten-year anniversary worshipping in this building.

But a couple of years ago we figured out we had maxxed out our property and if we were going to keep up with the growth we had to find another way to expand. The Lord led us to use a strategy of planting new campuses of CPC in those communities where many of our people were already living. So we started a campus in Millbrae almost three years ago and now they meet in San Bruno. Today is a milestone for them as they move into their new Crestmoor facility. Now we're laying the groundwork for a new campus in Redwood City. Not only that, we're going to a third service here in Foster City.

Why are we doing all of this? Because God has called us to build His dwelling place—the church. Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth" He said, "Just as my Father sent me, so I have sent you." And we haven't even scratched the surface of reaching the Peninsula for Christ.

That's the challenge that lies before us. And the question I want you to ask yourself is, What is God calling me to do? What's my part in this? It's not an issue of how the church meets **my** needs, it's an issue of what God is calling you to do for the advancement of His kingdom. I promise you that just as He did with those people, if you put your hand to the plow, He will bless you with an unmistakable sense of His presence, and He will stir you up even more and bless your efforts.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1362–10FC

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, November 20, 2011 at Central Peninsula Church
1005 Shell Boulevard | Foster City CA 94404 | 650 349.1132 | www.cpcfc.org. Additional copies available on request.