



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

The Return Home

Haggai 1:1–15

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series: The Story

Today I want to start off with an object lesson. I'm a visual learner so I think this will be helpful. This is a suitcase that I'm calling the "Suitcase of Life." This suitcase represents the limited amount of time that we all have for the things we think are most important. Did you know that the most important commodity you have is not your money but your time? You can make more money but you can't buy more time. We all have the same amount of time—24 hours every day, 7 days a week. When you give someone or something your time you are giving them a portion of your life that you will never get back. Here's the kicker—we all make time for what's important. Because our suitcases get full so quickly, we all try our best to prioritize what's most important.

In my life I have a job, so let me put a computer and a few books in the suitcase. I'm married, so here is a bottle of wine to represent that. Like good wine, a marriage needs to be cared for so that it gets better over time. I have three kids that wonderfully take a lot of my time. Here's a train, doll and a basketball to represent them and their activities. We like to see our family in Las Vegas often, so here's a photo album to add. I have friends that I enjoy spending time with. This pound of coffee represents the time spent catching up with them. I also have a few hobbies that I love to pursue; in goes the fishing pole. I'm trying to stay healthy and fit; in goes the gym shoes. At home, there is always a project to do or something to fix, so let's add a tool. There's always something up with one of our cars; throw in a quart of oil. We love to go on vacations, so here's a beach towel. Even though I work for the church, there are plenty of church activities that I'm involved with, not to mention my kid's school activities; add a CPC travel mug. Then of course, there is my spiritual life that I'm trying to cultivate every day; add my Bible. And since life doesn't always go as planned, let's throw in a crisis just to top things off. I've been sick for over three miserable weeks so here's my meds.

Do you see the problem? It doesn't all fit! And no, you can't get a bigger suitcase! Even if you are not a Christian, you deal with the same problem. Almost everyone I talk to, Christian or not, and ask, "How are you doing," they all tell me, "Busy. Man, I am just so busy." I find myself saying the same thing. We are busy doing good things, important things. It's hard to say no to all the opportunities that come our way. If you are a follower of Jesus, what happens so easily is we fill our lives to the very edges with busyness, no longer allowing any margin for God's priorities. Do we even know what God's priorities are?

C.S. Lewis wrote, "If we put first things first, we get the second things thrown in; but if we put second things first, we lose both the first and second things." The problem is many of us can't distinguish between first things and second things. Our priorities are often upside down. Jesus knew human nature so well. He knew that our hearts will often be filled with everything but him. That's why he commanded us to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you as well. Put God first and God promises to take care of everything else. But, how do we do that? How do we put God first in a world that never seems to slow down or let up? And what does God do when we make his big thing our small thing? That's what we are going to consider this morning.

The Story tells us that three generations, 50 years, have passed in exile in Babylon. God raises up Cyrus, a pagan king, a Persian king who conquers Babylon. Cyrus then releases God's people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. A new Persian king comes along, King Darius, and continues to allow the Jews to rebuild the temple. He even lends financial support. Only about 50,000 Jews return to Jerusalem to start work on the temple, the rest remain in exile. Those who return are called the remnant. At first, the remnant get to work and diligently begin rebuilding the temple. Things get off to a great start. But, like so many things in life, they grew tired of the task. It was not an easy job to rebuild the mighty temple and they were surrounded by hostile enemies. The opposition they faced from neighboring nations, along with the arduous task, discouraged them and wore them out. Finally they gave up and completely stopped the construction of the temple for 16 years. Discouragement and frustration has stopped many good endeavors for God. Every pastor I know has at some point in his or her career battled discouragement and wanted to give up.

During this time, the Israelites turn their attention to rebuilding their personal lives. Houses were built, farms were planted, livestock were raised and families were started. Nothing was wrong with the pursuit of those things. God wanted nothing more than to bless their lives once again. But, first things first, the temple needed to be rebuilt. God wanted to live again at the center of their community. The temple represented many things, but primarily it was where God would live among his people. Instead, they got busy with second things.

Enter Haggai the prophet who, along with Zachariah, urges God's people to put the rebuilding of the temple back at the top of their list of priorities. To put God first in the suitcase of their lives would require a radical change in how they lived, but it would be more than worth it. Let's read what Haggai tells them to do in order to put God first. We begin in Haggai 1:1–11.

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:

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

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. 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."

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. "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."

Put God First

Give careful thought to your ways

How do we put God first? Haggai tells us first to "give careful thought to our ways." The Hebrew phrase was literally, "put your heart on your roads." Two times in this chapter and three times in chapter 2 this phrase is repeated. In many ways this is the main message of the entire book. "Give careful thought to your ways." Think carefully about the things your heart desires.

Not only did the remnant stop working on the temple, they came up with a list of excuses. In verse 2 they say, **"The time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house."** There was a sense of guilt I think the people had. Deep down they wanted to follow God but Haggai's sermon ticked them off a little. According to the text, they didn't obey until over 20 days later. They push back on

Haggai and say, "Hey, you know what, we tried, we were off to a great start, but things got complicated. We got discouraged. We faced some opposition. So, obviously God wanted us to stop. So, what are we going to do? Wait around? No, we got to work on our own lives. How can you blame us for that? The time to rebuild the temple has not yet come. But, we'll get to it some day."

I hear that excuse all the time around the church. "I know I'm supposed to share my faith with others, but at my job I need to be real careful. The timing just hasn't been right." "I know I should tithe, but things have been really tight this year and I have too many family obligations." "I'm flattered, pastor, that you think my gifts and talents might help in that particular ministry at the church, but I don't have the time to serve just now. Maybe when the pressure of my job lets up a bit or when I retire." If I am rubbing anyone the wrong way, then you know exactly how the Israelites felt to God's message through Haggai. Give careful thought to your ways.

God then challenges their excuses and inactivity with three arguments. First he says,

"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

That statement must have stung. God was accusing the people of having plenty of time to build their own houses and no time for God. If you think about it, the people were prospering. They were building not just homes but panelled ones. They were planting vineyards, raising cattle and making babies. Life was really good. But something was deeply wrong. They had success but failed to put God first. They put the American Dream and affluence ahead of God's priorities. They chose comfort instead of God's work. They had plenty of time to prioritize their activities while the most important activity of God was ignored.

The second argument the Lord makes is just how futile that kind of life is. Again he says, consider your ways.

"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).

I can't think of another verse that describes our American culture any better. You know what God is saying here? Apart from God, nothing in this life ultimately satisfies. Without God, you can have a good life, but deep down there will be an on-going lack of satisfaction. You'll never be content. Nothing will bring you a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Without me, God says, you'll always feel restless. Maybe that describes you. You have a great life, but underneath it all, you're still longing for more.

The Lord gives them one more reason to put him first. Look again at verses 10 and 11,

“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.”

Apparently God caused a drought to happen in Jerusalem and for an agrarian society this was a major problem. Farming was everything. God is causing their frustration because they are living with upside down priorities. Sometimes God disciplines and tests you so you'll put him first.

I want to be really careful here. These verses are not saying that God is the cause of all your problems. Not all testing is a result of sin either. Bad things happen to good and bad people. Things happen for a reason and for no reason at all. That is life in a broken world marred by sin. But, because God wants nothing more than to be with us, he allows some things to happen in our lives that ultimately will point us back to him. There are God-ordained seasons of struggle and times when we are forced to drop to our knees because nothing else seems to work. God allows times of difficulty so that we will be sure to “give careful thought to our ways.” God sends seasons of trial and suffering to call his people back to their purpose.

I don't pretend to understand all that, I just know that's how God works. When we refuse to put God first, he has an incredible way of getting our attention. When our priorities become more important than God's our lives will be constantly marked by futility. We'll never be satisfied.

Obey Him

What's the solution? We find it in verse 12,

“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.”

What's the solution? Obedience. It is getting to work on the things God has given us to do. As Henry Blackaby, the author of *Experiencing God*, once said, “Find out where God is working and join him!” In the context of Haggai, it was the command in verse 8,

“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.”

For us, our job is not to build a temple but to work with Jesus to build his kingdom on earth. That means making spiritual things and God's work our top priority. That means serving God to the best of our ability. You don't fit God into your priorities. You put God first in the suitcase of life and fill the rest with what's left. Everyone has enough time to serve God. Everyone has enough

money to give to God. But, we don't have enough time and money to do everything we want and obey God.

That means we need to give careful thought to where our passions lie. Are you as eager to spend time with God in his Word as you are to watch the Warriors game? Ouch. Have you allowed the many good things in this life—your kids, your career, your boyfriend, your fitness—to squeeze God out of the suitcase? So many of us have been blessed with great families, amazing careers, and “paneled houses.” And like the remnant, we are not trying to deliberately ignore God. We tell ourselves that we'll get back to him one day. We just need to take care of these other things first. But, the time comes when we wake up one day and no longer think about God's temple. And the longer we allow that to happen, our passion for God ebbs away. Tithing becomes tipping. Prayers become catchy quotes. Church attendance becomes a once-a-month obligation. Serving the church becomes a duty that's fulfilled with a minimal amount of time, if at all. Connecting with other believers in a small group isn't even on our radar anymore. It's not that we forgot God, it's just that there is so much competition in our suitcase of life. When we put God first he promises “I am with you.”

Haggai does have some really good news! When we put God first, God promises to be with us. Look at the rest of the chapter.

“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).

The result of their obedience, in putting God first, was that the leader and the whole remnant acted together and began to rebuild the temple. There was a sense of unity and purpose and a rallying together for God's work. And five years later the temple was completed.

You can see in these verses that the Israelites really wanted to please God. They just got distracted. So, when the word of the Lord came to them through the prophet Haggai, after a few weeks of considering their ways, they finally obeyed and did what God commanded. They completely reprioritized their lives and put God first. I'm sure this was a hard thing for them to do and it meant saying no to many good things. But, after acting in obedience, the Lord does what he's been doing all along: he supernaturally empowers and equips the people to do the work he's calling them to do. And he tells them, “I will be with you.”

Why does God make such a big deal about his temple? God's passion, his chief goal in The Story is to be with us. The temple is

a picture of God's desire to live among his people. It's a physical place that reminded Israel that God wants to be with them. But, the problem is our sin separates his people and the world from a Holy God. God's solution required a blood sacrifice so that we could regain access to his presence. Ultimately, the temple sacrificial system failed and the temple was finally destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans.

Why should we put God first? Because God put us first. We are his number one priority. Because God loves us, he sent his one and only Son Jesus, to live with us and ultimately die in our place and for our sin. Jesus was the ultimate temple sacrifice and

after his death the curtain of the temple was torn in two; he is greater than the temple. Through Jesus, we now have direct access to God the Father. When you place your faith and your life in Jesus, when you ultimately put him first, he promises to be with you forever. You become the temple, God's dwelling place. He'll never leave you and he'll never forsake you. Put God first because he put you first.

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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