

How to Overhaul Your Priorities

Text: Haggai 1:1-15

General Direction

To study the prophet Haggai, whose fiery messages about finishing the building of the temple urged people to re-establish priorities God blesses. [Deliver this message after the reading for Week 10 is completed.]

Back Story

In 586 BC, the Babylonian army destroyed the city of Jerusalem, along with the temple built by King Solomon. The surviving populace is exiled to Babylon. Fifty years later (537 BC) the Persians conquered the Babylonians and passed a decree allowing the Jews to return to their land. Those who returned had the challenging task of rebuilding their lives in a land that had been destroyed and neglected for decades. When Haggai, one of the post-exilic prophets (whose ministry took place 80 years prior to Nehemiah's wall restoration project), prophesies to the people, they have been busy rebuilding their homes but the temple is still in ruins. Haggai attempts to motivate the people to reprioritize their lives around the construction of the temple.

Sermon Purpose and Outline

This sermon explores the prophetic ministry of Haggai, who preached the importance of focusing on God-given priorities. As we learn about Haggai's challenge to rebuild the temple, we will see how easy it is to let God's priorities slip into last place, and the importance of re-establishing the right focus.

Sermon Question: How can I accomplish the most important things in life?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Recognize misplaced priorities | Haggai 1:1-4 |
| 2. Realize when God removes blessing | Haggai 1:5-11 |
| 3. Respond in obedience to correction | Haggai 1:12-13 |

Sermon Introduction

Have you ever purchased a house that was a fixer-upper? Did you find that it took considerably more work than you expected? And what happened to your other priorities as long as the home improvement project was underway? Did you find yourself neglecting important things such as family, work, or education while your house was being rebuilt?

All kinds of things can turn our priorities upside down. Just daily life can be enough to get us side-tracked:

Illustration

If Jesus Christ were here today, do you think he would serve on three church committees; drive in the car pool on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; attend two services on Sunday; manage a boys' organization; serve on the lunch committee at the local synagogue or church; and participate on several volunteer organizations in his spare time?

In doing all of that, even he might have trouble getting into the Word or having time to be in his Father's presence. I am convinced that if Jesus were here, his schedule would be a great deal different from ours.

It was clear from the example of our Lord, that all of the decisions of his life were made in light of his Father's will, and when we prioritize our lives in this regard, we have submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ by making everything subservient to his direction.

—Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations

Do you have a nagging sense that your life is a little out of control? Do you get to the end of the day and wonder if you really did anything of eternal significance? As we open our Bibles to the book of Haggai, imagine an entire country where every house is a fixer-upper, and every household in disarray. The Jews have returned from their exile in Babylon to a land in ruins. They have busied themselves with rebuilding their houses, and probably with several other misplaced priorities that have crept into their Day-timers, but they have neglected rebuilding the temple, the center of worship in Jerusalem.

As we read about Haggai's urging to begin rebuilding the temple, we will discover how to set and keep God-given priorities, so we can accomplish the most important things in life.

Connection with Overarching Theme: The Journey of Faith

The journey of faith is a series of choices...will we do what we think is important, or will we trust God and do what he says is important? Sometimes, we think we know what's best to do, and we pursue our own priorities in spite of what God says. Today, in the story of Haggai, we find out

how to recognize the signals that we have made the wrong choice, and we discover how to re-establish God-given priorities.

Sermon Question: How can I accomplish the most important things in life?

1. Recognize misplaced priorities

Haggai 1:1-4

Haggai confronts Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.'" (1:2)

Note something: the people seem to know that the rebuilding of the temple is important, but they disagree on the timing: "The time has not yet come." They didn't say "no;" they just said "later".

Application

Is there an area in your life where God has been prompting you to grow, and you are procrastinating? You haven't actually told God "no," you just say "Later, God. This isn't a convenient time."

- We say "later" to refocusing on our marriage that is in deep need of repair.
- We say "later" to beginning a consistent pattern of financial giving to our church.
- We say "later" to seeking help with an addictive pattern in our lives.

Creative Teaching Tool

Show a clip from *The Devil Wears Prada*, called "Going to Paris." In this clip, Andy neglects her true self and those who care about her most to pursue the demands of her career. Even though her personal life is falling apart, she puts off the courageous step of re-prioritizing.

Clip is available by subscription to Wingclips. View the clip here:

http://wingclips.com/cart.php?target=product&product_id=16619

Why is Andy procrastinating? I would suggest to you that at the base of her procrastination, and behind most people's procrastination, is fear. There's fear that if you re-prioritize now, you'll lose your job. Or fear of rejection if you try to work on your marriage. Or fear of emptiness or loss if you work on your addiction. What fear is behind your procrastination? Why haven't you done something before now about your misplaced priorities?

In Haggai's day, it appears that it was materialism that had people's priorities misaligned:

Haggai 1:4

*Is it time for you yourselves to dwell **in your paneled houses**, and this temple to lie in ruins?*

Haggai is saying, “Work on the temple has been delayed long enough. Stop focusing on your selfish materialistic pursuits. It’s time to begin rebuilding.” Accomplishing the most important things in life starts with recognizing the fact that you have misplaced priorities.

2. Realize when God removes blessing

Haggai 1:5-11

Haggai explains to the people that their refusal to rebuild the temple has caused God to withhold his blessing from their lives.

*⁵ Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶ **You have planted much, but have 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."*

Haggai speaks of disappointment with the harvest. The people expected much, but received little. This scarcity was attributed to the desire of God to get the people’s attention so they would restore proper priorities.

*⁹ **"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 his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. ¹¹ I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands."*

Have you ever experienced a season in your life when the blessing of God was withdrawn because of disobedience? When we turn from God, he is not obligated to continue to pour blessing into our lives.

It can be surprisingly easy to miss the fact that God has removed his hand of blessing from our lives. Consider the successful entrepreneur. He has all the trappings of success – the cars, the house, the private schools for his kids – so he can be lulled into thinking that God is blessing him. But if he is putting a priority on his career over the relationships God has entrusted to his care, the material possessions may not go away, but the relationships will suffer. God has removed his blessing, but the entrepreneur may be too preoccupied with his wrong priorities to realize it.

Creative Teaching Tool

Show a clip from *A Perfect Day* called “The Way Things Were.” Here, an author discovers fame when his book skyrockets to the bestseller list. But the trappings of his success challenge his relationships to his wife and daughter, and we glimpse a mysterious stranger who will later tell him he has 40 days to live for him to get his moral bearings back.

Clip is available by subscription to Wingclips. View the clip here:

http://wingclips.com/cart.php?target=product&product_id=16557

Do you think Rob realizes yet that he is not experiencing God's blessing? Do you think he is mistaking his success for happiness? Isn't that a common mistake many of us make?

Cross Reference

In 1 Peter 3, Peter explains to his readers that God may send or withhold blessing from our lives, depending upon whether we pursue or neglect his purposes.

1 Peter 3:8-12

⁸Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. ⁹Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may **inherit a blessing**. ¹⁰For,

*"Whoever would **love life and see good days***

must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.

¹¹He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.

¹²For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

This passage clearly sets out the priorities we need to have if we want to "inherit a blessing." And in case you wanted to know what God's blessing looks like, Peter describes it as a person who would "love life and see good days." Does anyone here want to live a life they love and see good days? I thought so. Well, here's God's prescription for a blessed life: put a priority on your relationships. Look at all the relational advice in this passage! Live in harmony. Be sympathetic. Be compassionate and humble. Don't retaliate. Speak the truth. Seek peace – pursue it! So, has God removed his blessing? Your relationships will be the first to show it. Check your relationships, and they'll be your gauge as to whether or not your priorities are right.

3. Respond in obedience to correction

Haggai 1:12-13

*The whole remnant of the people **obeyed** the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai. (1:12b)*

This is stunning. Often Old Testament prophets are ignored, mistreated, beaten up or even killed. The wonder here is that the people immediately responded to Haggai's words and agreed to resume work on the temple. When they recognized their misplaced priorities and realized God had removed his blessing from them, they responded with immediate obedience.

Creative Teaching Tool

Show a clip from *Cheaper By the Dozen* called "Giving Up the Dream." In this story, Tom's dream coaching job has led to chaos at home, so he decides to re-prioritize. He takes a bold step and quits his job to spend more time with his family.

Clip is available by subscription to Wingclips. View the clip here:

http://wingclips.com/cart.php?target=product&product_id=16727

In this clip, Tom's boss needles him a little about his choice: "Giving up the dream, huh?" Tom's response is, "Just going with a different one." I think that's what God does when he asks us to shift our priorities. He asks us to let go of one dream, only to give us a new and better one in its place. And then, remember the boss's next question? "No regrets?" And Tom's answer is striking: "If I mess up raising my kids, nothing I achieve will matter much." Now, that's someone who gets it. He gets what the wrong priorities will do in the long run.

Saying "yes" to God when we realize we have strayed can be a powerful thing. It can unleash God's blessing and movement in our lives.

I want you to notice something very important in the next verse.

Haggai 1:13

Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: "I am with you," declares the Lord.

What amazing words to hear from the heart of God. This is precisely how God responds when someone resolves to adopt God's priorities. He promises his presence.

Application

Imagine God whispering this phrase into your life as you begin to realign your life according to godly priorities.

- *I am with you.*
- *As you move to rebuild your marriage, I am with you.*
- *As you begin to pursue generosity, I am with you.*
- *As you pursue me, I am with you.*

Why is this an important realization? It is crucial to know that God will be with you in your priority shift, because this probably won't be easy. You'll need God's help. You'll need his power to make the right choices. You'll need his discernment to know the next step to take.

You'll need his wisdom when people don't react well to your new paradigm. But you've got God's word that he'll be there for you if you respond in obedience to his correction.

Conclusion

As we have discussed the rebuilding of the temple today, have you detected an area of your life that is in need of correction? Has the spirit of God impressed upon you an area of neglect that needs new focus?

Application

Let me challenge you to take a corrective step within 48 hours. Otherwise, there is a chance that God's whisper to your soul will be lost. Within the next two days, take a tangible step toward responding to God's prompting.

In James 4:6 and 10 we find these words of hope:

*God opposes the proud but **gives grace to the humble.***

*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and **he will lift you up***

Begin to move... and anticipate his renewed favor and presence in your life.