

Consider Your Ways (Hag I)

I. A PROPHETIC CALL TO EVALUATE OUR PURSUITS

- A. As we enter into a new year together as a spiritual family, I want to invite us into a focused season of looking at our lives, our pursuits, our focus, our passions, our loves — and ask God to reorient them wholly around his desires and his vision for us (both personally and corporately).
- B. The New Year affords us with a latent momentum toward such endeavors. Each New Year we are overtaken by so much energy toward New Year’s resolutions and refocusing our lives in ways that will benefit us.
- C. However, most of our energy toward New Year’s resolutions has to do with our physical health, our personal fulfillment, or our own ideas of success. Although there is value in pursuing a healthier lifestyle or being more disciplined, we ought to give more energy intentionally and consistently to assessing and becoming resolved around our spiritual well-being.

⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and the life to come. ⁹The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰For to this end we toil and strive. (1 Tim 4.7-10)

- D. There is a spiritual value toward resolution. I believe that God is inviting us as a spiritual family to take a season of intentional focus to “consider our ways” and ask him to highlight areas where we have gotten off track; and then ask him to reestablish us in the things that matter and that are important for our life in him.
- E. Paul was unashamed to hold fast to a type of “resolution” in his life. He oriented all his pursuits toward a clear and defined vision in Christ.

²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

²⁵Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

²⁶So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. (1 Cor 9.24-26)

- F. I believe this is particularly important for us because of where we find ourselves as a spiritual family.

1. ***A season of extended pruning and shaking.*** Most of us in this room have walked through an extended season of shaking, pruning, and discipline from the hand of the Lord. For the last several years (beginning in the spring of 2020) our culture has walked through a time of pressure and shaking. One of the Lord’s purposes in these types of seasons is an invitation to let go of things (pursuits, loves, etc.) in our lives in order to focus our lives more on the things that he desires for us.

²⁶Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens... ¹⁷in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. (Heb 12.26-27)

2. ***A changing of the seasons.*** Many of us have experienced a type of settling or season-change over the last several months. It is important for us as the seasons change and we begin to establish a new reality to be intentional and focused on what we build upon and build toward.
3. ***A focused season looking at “building foundations”.*** Since Easter we have been camped out in the words of Jesus calling us to order our lives toward him in obedience. First, in the Upper Room Discourse, and then in the Sermon on the Mount. I desire that these passages not simply be things that we walk through and then “graduate” from, but *foundation stones in the life of our spiritual family.*
4. ***Jesus’ words in Matt 5-6.*** In a specific way we have just walked through Jesus’ words in these chapters that have to do with things we are to ***actively resist*** and means of grace we are to ***actively pursue***. To walk in these ways means that we are intentional to look at our lives and *when, how, and for what purpose* we are going to do these things.

II. CONTEXT OF HAGGAI'S MINISTRY

- A. The prophecy of Haggai is given in the broader context of Israel's return from exile and their efforts to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the temple.
- B. In 606 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, began to lay siege to the city of Jerusalem and take the people of Israel into captivity. After several waves of attack, Nebuchadnezzar finally destroyed the city of Jerusalem — including the temple — in 586 BC. This exile and destruction was a direct chastisement of the Lord against his people for their continued rebellion and sin (2 Chr 36.15-21).
- C. After 70 years of captivity (~536 BC), the people of Israel began to return to the land of Israel as God had promised (cf. Jer 29.10). At that time, approximately 50,000 of the exiles returned to Judea in order to rebuild the city and their temple (cf. Ezra 1-2).
- D. There are three sections of Scripture that highlight the first wave of the returning exiles and God's dealing with them. Ezra 1-6 contains the narrative account, and Haggai 1-2 and Zechariah 3-8 are God's prophetic evaluation and encouragement for his people during this time.
- E. There are four important individuals to know in understanding the storyline.
 - 1. **Zerubbabel**: the governor of Judah at the time of the rebuilding and the ministry of Haggai and Zechariah.
 - 2. **Joshua**: the high priest who was over the temple ministry.
 - 3. **Haggai**: The prophet who gave four prophetic messages to the people over a five-month period in 520 BC.
 - 4. **Zechariah**: His ministry started several months after Haggai's ministry. The bulk of his message was a series of visions he received in one night (1.7-6.8). Much of his ministry was focused on encouraging the people of Israel as they sought to rebuild the temple.
- F. Upon returning to the city, the exiles experienced a rush of focus and energy to rebuild the temple. This lasted for about a year as they laid the foundation. Although they began with zeal to rebuild God's house and the city, they were met with discouragement and disappointment and stopped (cf. Ezra 3.10; 4.24).
- G. However, after this initial burst of work, the foundations of the temple went untouched for sixteen years. It is into this context that God sends the prophet Haggai to confront the people and reorient their labors and efforts toward his ways.

III. CONSIDER YOUR WAYS

- A. Understanding the context of Haggai's ministry helps us to understand the nature of this first prophetic message given by God to his people.
- B. Over time, God's people had abandoned the pursuit of building his house (this was their *purpose* at the time) and had focused on building their own houses.

³Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ⁴"Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ⁵Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. (Hag 1.3-5)

- C. One of the remarkable realities of human life is our own propensity to get off course in small and imperceptible ways. There are many places in our lives where we make small, seemingly insignificant choices, to respond to a specific circumstance (or set of circumstances) and before we know it we have walked through decades without truly pursuing the things we are called by God to pursue.

- D. In order to remain focused/purposed we have to continually look at our lives. We often do not drift into things that bring and sustain life. Rather, we tend to drift away from things that are in line with our deepest desires and vision.
- E. Many of the things that Lord rebukes the people of Israel for are not sinful in their own regard. Rather, they had wrongly ordered their lives and their pursuits apart from considering what God had called them to give themselves to.
- F. Likewise, it is easy for us to be consumed with pursuits that are not sinful but are disordered in their value.
- G. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus invited his disciples to give primary focus to pursuing the things of his kingdom and trust God the Father for supplying all their needs.

³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matt 6.33)

- H. Because of their disordered pursuits, God declared that he had stood against them. For sixteen years the children of Israel believed that if they just “had a little more” they would be ready to return to the things that mattered. However, God kept them in a state of need and dependence in order that they would return to him.

⁶You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes... ⁹You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the Lord of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. ¹⁰Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, and the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.” (Hag 1.6, 9-11)

- I. Often times believers do not understand the relationship between their daily choices and their spiritual health. Many of us experience seasons of spiritual lethargy/sleepiness because of the disordered use of our time. To walk through life aimlessly costs us more time and energy in the long run.
- J. We must desire for our schedules and our resources to be in line with God’s vision for us as those who have been called to follow him.
- K. Paul instructs the Ephesian church to carefully assess their lives in order that they might use their time in the most God-honoring manner.

¹⁴Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ ¹³Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁴making the best use of the time, because the days are evil (Eph 5.14-16)

IV. RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE (HAG 1.12-15)

- A. Upon hearing the word of the Lord through Haggai, the people were quick to respond and sought to obey.
- B. They ***obeyed the word***. To hear the word of God is closely tied to seeking to respond with a spirit of obedience. Hearing God’s word is more than simply giving mental assent to its truth. Rather, belief must be coupled with a spirit of obedience that seeks to respond in accordance with the word given.
- C. The people are said to have ***feared the Lord***. Closely tied to the desire to obey is the expression of the fear of the Lord. Here the fear of the Lord is not necessarily the *experience* of reverence and awe (trembling), but rather a deep-seated belief that their actions matter to God (cf. 2 Cor 5.10-11).
- D. Closely tied to all of these actions we see that the ***Lord stirred the people to work***. As throughout all the Scripture, it is the Lord who is at work bringing forth both the *will to work* and the *strength to work* (cf. Phil 2.12-13). The evidence of the Lord’s stirring is their response to the word in a spirit of obedience.

V. A SEASON OF CONSIDERING

- A. This January, in lieu of a focused season of fasting and prayer, we are inviting our spiritual family into a focused season of “considering our ways” before the Lord.
- B. This is an invitation to capitalize on where the Lord has brought us and ask him to intentionally reorder and reorient our pursuits, our efforts, and the use of our resources around what he calls valuable, true, and lasting.
- C. To “consider our ways” acknowledges that there is a *cost* to discipleship. However, the truth of the Scripture reminds us that the treasure of the kingdom of heaven is more valuable than any cost we could possibly pay.

⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matt 13.44)

- D. Stepping into a season of focused evaluation and consideration of how we are utilizing our time, energy, and resources does not *earn* us anything in the presence of God. Just like the people of Haggai’s day, we can be assured that the Lord is already with us as we seek to respond and evaluate our lives before him.

¹³Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord’s message, ‘I am with you, declares the Lord.’ (Hag 1.13)

E. Questions:

1. *Are my values (expressed in my schedule and my budget) aligned with the values of the kingdom of heaven?*
2. *What does **God** have for me in this season of my life; what is **God’s vision** for me in this season? (This should include asking him related to spiritual, relational, vocational, financial, physical, etc. realms of your life)*
3. *Are there pursuits in my life that are hindering my spiritual health and vibrancy of life in God?*
4. *What am I giving my evenings and weekends to on a consistent basis? Do these align with the values of the kingdom/God’s vision for my life?*

F. Prayers:

1. Prayer for a ***spirit of wisdom and revelation*** (Eph 1.17-18)
2. Prayer for the ***fear of the Lord*** (Prov 1.7)
3. Prayer for the ***spirit of obedience*** (Ps Ps 119.32)
4. Prayer for ***grace to walk*** in what God has called you to (Ps 119.10)

G. Concrete steps:

1. Set aside time(s) over the next week (and weeks through January) to begin giving focused attention to your pursuits, your time, your energy, and your resources.
2. Commit to a Bible reading plan (Bible in a year, 10-chapters of NT a day, etc., Daily Psalms)
3. Look at your relationship with your screens/social media.
4. Look at what you give your time to in your evenings/weekends.