



Haggai

HAGGAI:

A Two-Week Devotional through Haggai

BY TOM SCHMIDT

INTRO

In the summer of 2024, I had the privilege of preaching through the book of Haggai to the congregation of Cross of Christ Fellowship. Though it only lasted three weeks, I believe the Lord powerfully used it in my own soul: exposing sin; reminding me of His grace; leading me in repentance; helping me see the greatness of Christ.

This two-week devotional flows out of that time. I hope and pray that it is a blessing you.

Haggai is a book that has much to say to us today. Some of the writings found in the appendix are meant to show how practical and extremely relevant Haggai is for Christians in 2024.

To God be the glory!

-Tom Schmidt

Pastor of Cross of Christ Fellowship

Naperville, Illinois

July 2024

DAY 1: A God Who Rules Over All History (1:1)

Haggai 1:1: *“In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.”*

The God of the Bible is a God who rules over all history. He is also a God who encounters His people in historical moments. One remarkable feature of Haggai—as pointed out by commentators—are all the dates given in this short book (1:1, 1:15; 2:1; 2:10; 2:20). These are precise moments in history that God’s Word came through His prophet Haggai to speak to His people Israel.

We learn from the first date—given to us in 1:1 (8/29/520 B.C. by modern calendars)—that God’s Word came to Haggai during the second year of Darius the king. Following the account of Ezra, some of God’s people had returned from exile and begun work on the temple, only to be stalled out after facing some initial resistance (the altar and foundation were built, but then the work stopped). *God’s people were supposed to rebuild the temple, but have not done what they were supposed to do for at least 15 years!* This means there has been 15 years of delayed obedience on the part of Israel.

Now God’s Word comes to God’s people in a time of prolonged neglect and disobedience. God is not finished with Israel, but comes to them in His grace. God patiently waited and now, at just the right moment in history, brought His Word to His people through Haggai to bring about transformation and change.

Praise God that He rules over history and is aware of what is happening at this moment in history!

DAY 2: A Speaking God (1:1-2)

Haggai 1:1-2: *“In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.”*

The view known as “agnosticism” is quite popular today. It states that God *might* exist, but we do not know—it is impossible to know—and if God does exist, there is no way for us to know who He is or what He is like. Those who hold to this view believe that there is simply too much confusion and too many different religions for us to know who God is or what He has said.

The Bible teaches a very different view. God not only exists, He has spoken, and His words can be heard, understood, and known. God has spoken in human words to human beings. The infinite, eternal God, has spoken in a human language to reveal Himself to us! As the theologian and thinker Francis Schaeffer titled one of His books: He is there and He is Not Silent.

In Haggai we see God communicate to His people through His prophet: “the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet... ‘thus says the LORD’” (1:1-2). God spoke and His people heard. God had a message to communicate and that message could be heard and understood.

Throughout the Old Testament, God spoke through His prophets, but now He speaks us to through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). We do not need new human prophets because we have Jesus, who is the promised Prophet, Priest, and King. We hear the words of Christ in the Scriptures and through the preaching of God’s Word.

Praise God that we are not faced with a mute God, but a talking God! May we listen to His voice today.

DAY 3: A God Who Exposes Our Sin (1:3-6)

Haggai 1:3-6: ³ *Then 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? ⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ You 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."*

The message that God speaks to His people through Haggai is one of indictment. The Israelites are making excuses and claiming that now is the ‘not the time’ to rebuild the temple (1:2). However, while they claim this, they have the time and energy to rebuild their own “paneled” (1:4) houses (“paneled” here may point to luxury). The people have not done what they were supposed to do and God exposes their sin through His Word.

The exposure of sin is itself a gracious act. Sin is ruinous and self-destructive. Sin alienates us from the holy God who made us and love us. Sin leads us away from the truth and beauty of God’s good plan. Thus, it is kind and good of God to expose the sins of Isarel through Haggai.

Tim Keller once said that if your God never disagrees with you, then you do not have the true God, but a god of your own imagination. When we read the Bible or hear the Word of God preached, we ought to regularly be exposed and confronted with our sin. If we are not, it questionable whether we are really listening to the true God who is there and who speaks through Scripture.

Praise God who speaks the truth to us and exposes our sin! Though it is often painful to see our sin, it is God’s loving grace that exposes sin, so that we might repent and walk in His ways.

May God grant us soft hearts to repent of sin that God’s Word exposes in our lives.

DAY 4: A God who Disciplines Us and Withholds Blessings (1:9-11)

Haggai 1:9-11: *“⁹ You 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. ¹⁰ Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. ¹¹ And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.”*

The God of Scripture is not the god of Disney or Daniel Tiger—a god who is only nice and only concerned with meeting our emotional needs. The God of Scripture is holy. He is real. He is just, powerful, and almighty. He disciplines His people and at times withholds blessings from them due to their disobedience. He rules over hurricanes, tornadoes, and droughts, and uses them for His good purposes.

We see this truth in Haggai 1:9-11. Because the people have refused to rebuild the temple—a good work they were supposed to carry out but have failed to do for 15 years—God has withheld blessings from them. Their self-centered interests have not resulted in the prosperity they hoped for (1:6, 9-10). The reason is given in 1:9: *“Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house.”* Due to the people’s disobedience, God says, *“I have called for a drought?”* (1:11). Note the first-person pronoun.

This is the God whom we ought to revere, fear, and be humbled before. It is a God who at times withholds blessings and brings hardship into our lives. As James 4:3 says, *‘You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.’* And, as seen in 1 Cor 11:27-32, God at times even allows his people to be weak, sick or die as an act of discipline.

We ought to ask ourselves, ‘Am I doing the work God is calling me to do?’ We must ‘consider our ways’ (Haggai 1:5,7). If we refuse to do the good works God calls us to, then we should expect Him to discipline us in His holy and wise ways. But we must remember that God is kind even in midst of such discipline—He disciplines those He loves.

Praise God who disciplines His people! Praise God who cares enough for us to even withhold material and spiritual blessings when we are wayward or willfully disobedient.¹

¹ See appendix 1 “Is My Suffering Due to My Sin?”

DAY 5: A God Who Calls Us to Good Works (1:8)

Haggai 1:8: “⁸ *Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD.*”

God calls his people to good works. We are not saved on the basis of our good works, but through faith in Christ (Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9). Yet, as a people who are saved by God’s grace through faith, we are called to do works (Eph 2:10). The same was true in Haggai’s day.

The people of Israel were called to “build the house,”—the temple. This was where God’s people would bring their sacrifices and pray together. It was to be a place of worship, fellowship and prayer. And God promised that he would ‘take pleasure in it’ and ‘be glorified’ by it.

God has no needs, but graciously delights in the worship of His people. We were made for His glory and nothing else can satisfy the longings of our hearts. This God has good works for us to do today. We are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves. We are called to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of Christ (Matt 28:18-20).

Praise God that He delights in our good works today.

DAY 6: A God who is With His People (1:13)

Haggai 1:13: *“¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD."*

As God exposes the sin of Israel and calls them rebuild the temple, He also gives them a promise of His presence. In 1:13 we see God speak, “I am with you.” As Israel worked to rebuild the temple, they could take heart that God was with them.

The promise of God’s presence with His people is given numerous times throughout the Bible. Here we see another example. I am sure this would have bolstered the people as they sought to take on the difficult and intimidating work of rebuilding the temple. To know that God is with you as you do His work is a precious gift.

Jesus promised to be with us as we go out and proclaim the gospel (Matt 28:20). It is a hard work, but we are not alone. God is with us.

DAY 7: A God Powerful Enough to Change Us (1:11-15)

Haggai 1:11-15: *“¹¹ And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.” ¹² Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jebozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD. ¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD." ¹⁴ And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jebozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.”*

Surely one of the most surprising and striking things of Haggai 1 is the response of God's people. Instead of ignoring Haggai, the people *“obeyed the voice of the LORD their God”* (Haggai 1:12)! This was after 15 or so years of neglect and disobedience. Now the people *“worked on the house”* (1:14) and this work began 23 days after the initial call to repent and recognize their sinful ways (1:15).

I am encouraged that a group of believers who were disobedient for 15 or so years could change and begin to do what God called them to do. God Himself is the one who “stirs” up the people (1:13) and it is because of this that the people get to work.

As long as we are alive, it is not too late for God to change us. The Holy Spirit empowers us to put sin to death and carry on the good works of God. He did this in Haggai's time, and today. We need not give into cynicism or unbelief: God changes people. He changed us, and is continuing to change us. This should give us courage to press on.

Praise the God who changes people!

DAY 8: A God who Is Aware of Our Discouragements (2:1-3)

Haggai 2:1-3: *“In the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ² “Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people, and say, ³ ‘Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?’”*

It must have been very discouraging for the people of Haggai’s day to see the results of their temple. Compared to Solomon’s temple, their efforts must have seemed pathetic. Solomon’s temple was exceedingly glorious and majestic, took years to build, was very well funded, and adorned in places with gold and all kinds of beautiful designs. On top of this, it had the ark of God and was inaugurated with God’s very glory filling the temple. I am sure that the attempts of the Jews in Haggai’s day paled in comparison. And, some of those living had seen that former temple. This Second Temple (Zerubbabel’s temple) was ‘as nothing’ in their eyes (2:3).

God was not unaware of their emotional state. God knew the discouragements that swelled up in the hearts of the Israelites as they beheld their work. He knew their tears—and ‘captured them in his bottle’ (Ps 56:8). He knew their fears. And here in Haggai 2:1-3 He addressed these discouragements openly and tenderly.

This is a beautiful truth about God: He knows our discouragements. As we seek to obey God and do the good works He has called us to (Eph 2:10), we will face disheartening, discouraging times—we may even ‘despair of life’ (2 Cor 1:8). But we need not lose hope, because God is aware of our discouragements. And, as we will see in Haggai 2:4-9, He speaks into them.

Praise God that He is aware of our discouragements.

DAY 9: A God who Encourages Us with His Presence (2:4-5)

Haggai 2:4-5: *“ Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work, for I am with you, declares the LORD of hosts, ⁵ according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt. My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.”*

Three times in Haggai 2 we hear the call to “be strong.” God tells Zerubbabel the governor to be strong. God tells Joshua the high priest to be strong, and God tells the people to be strong. They needed this, as they were discouraged by the results of rebuilding the temple (Haggai 2:1-3).

But God does not only tell the people to be strong and carry on the work, but He also promises to be with them. God says, ‘Work, for I am with you...My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not.’ (Haggai 2:4-5). The very presence of God Himself was to give the people fresh courage, joy, and motivation to do the work of rebuilding the temple. God was with them! They need not fear, but could work with the joy of being in God’s presence and working for God’s glory. (Note: this is the second time God has promised to be with His people in the book Haggai [1:13]).

Jesus assures us that He is with us as carry on the work of the Great Commission (Matt 28:20). As we share the gospel and make disciples, Christ is with us. As we do works of mercy and lovingly serve our neighbor, God is with us. The Holy Spirit fills us, and ‘leads us on level paths’ (Ps 143:10).

May we remember that as Christians, our God is with us as we do the works He has for us. May we be strengthened by the presence of God today.

DAY 10: The Far Greater Glory to Come (2:6-9)

Haggai 2:6-9: *“For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land. ⁷ And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts. ⁸ The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts. ⁹ The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.”*

As God’s people took part in the difficult and discouraging work of temple rebuilding, God gave them two reasons to keep going. First, God assured them that He would be present with them (2:4-5). Second, He promised them a future far more glorious than what their eyes could see (2:6-9).

God promised to *“fill this house with glory”* (2:7) and that the *“latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former”* (2:9). While the temple of Zerubbabel may have looked small and insignificant (2:3), God would bring about glory in the future even more glorious than Solomon’s temple! This came about in the coming of Jesus Christ, God the Son who came to Earth and “tabernacled” among us (John 1:14). He is the true temple of God (2:21)—God with us—and those who come to Him in faith become part of the temple (1 Cor 6:19).

The knowledge of a glorious and wonderful future would have strengthened the believers in Haggai’s time. It would have helped them see that their ‘labor was not in vain.’ This is true for Christians today: we too are waiting for something far better (the return of Christ along with the new heavens and the new Earth). Presently, we wait and groan with Creation (Rom 8), but the knowledge of what is coming gives us fresh motivation to endure, be strong, and do the good works God has given us.

As Christians, we are part of that future temple: the church. This church is beautiful, but one day the beautiful church will become the more beautiful church.²

² See Appendix 2

DAY 11: God's Blessings for an Obedient People 2:10-19

Haggai 2:10-19: ¹⁰ "On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet, ¹¹ "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: ¹² 'If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?'" The priests answered and said, "No." ¹³ Then Haggai said, "If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?" The priests answered and said, "It does become unclean." ¹⁴ Then Haggai answered and said, "So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the LORD, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean. ¹⁵ Now then, consider from this day onward. Before stone was placed upon stone in the temple of the LORD, ¹⁶ how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty." ¹⁷ I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and with mildew and with hail, yet you did not turn to me, declares the LORD. ¹⁸ Consider from this day onward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider: ¹⁹ Is the seed yet in the barn? Indeed, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree have yielded nothing. But from this day on I will bless you.""

As we draw near to the end of the book, we hear God promise to bless His people (*'But from this day on I will bless you'* 2:19). Earlier in the book, we learned that God had withheld material blessings for the people of Israel due to the neglect of the temple (ch 1). Through the preaching of Haggai, the people have begun building and are now months into rebuilding. Now God promises to bless them.

In 2:10-19 Haggai speaks to the priests about the spread of holiness and contamination. A sacrifice offered does not spread holiness with things it touches, but an unclean person—unclean by contamination of a dead body—does spread uncleanness. The people of Israel—because of their refusal to turn to God and obey Him by rebuilding the temple—are like an unclean person spreading uncleanness: all their works and sacrifices are unclean, and God has withheld material blessing from them as a form of discipline for their disobedience. But now the people are obeying, and God has promised to bless them.

Here we see blessings for obedience. This is one of the many ways God helps motivate his people to holiness. Calvin, in His commentary, speaks about how God uses this method for the 'tardy and sluggish,' but then leads his people to obey out of love and gratitude. Blessings for obedience then is especially useful for the immature believer—as we grow in our Christian maturity we learn to obey for other reasons: because we really are a new Creation; because we want to love and please God; because we are walking in the Spirit; so that we might be assured of our faith by the fruit; so that unbelievers would see and be converted.

God is a good Father who uses discipline to lead His children forward. At times He withholds blessing because of their disobedience and at times He blesses them for their obedience.

Praise God for the many ways that He leads forward in holiness, faith, and love³

³ See Appendix 3 on "Blessings for Obedience"

DAY 12: God's Rule Over the Nations and the Greater Zerubbabel (2:20-23)

Haggai 2:20-23: ²⁰ *The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month,* ²¹ *"Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the heavens and the earth, ²² and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother. ²³ On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, the son of Shealtiel, declares the LORD, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts."*

The book of Haggai ends with a message to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah. It is a promise of God to overthrow the nations and establish God's kingdom. It is a promise of God to honor Zerubbabel—the servant of God who is chosen by God. Zerubbabel will be like the 'signet ring' on a mighty king—the king of kings: God Himself. God will shake the nations and Zerubbabel is God's faithful servant. This message would have strengthened Zerubbabel, and helped him to complete the building of the temple.

This message also leads God's people to marvel at the mighty kingly rule of God. God truly rules over all the nations. None of God's purposes can be thwarted—all come to pass. We need to remember this as we face uncertain political times and future of our own nation. God is in control, so we need not fear.

The promise made to Zerubbabel finds its ultimate and sure fulfillment in Jesus—in whom all the promises of God find their 'yes and amen' (1 Cor 1:20). Zerubbabel was in the line of king David, and Jesus—by the flesh—is descended from Zerubbabel (Matt 1:12-13). Jesus is the Greater Zerubbabel, who, as God's Son, carries the authority and approval of God the Father as He does God's works and establishes God's kingdom on Earth. Every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord and every knee will bow before Him (Rev 2:9-11), and people from every tongue will worship before Him (Rev 7:9-12).

Praise Jesus, our great Zerubbabel!

DAY 13: Read Through Haggai

Read through the whole book of Haggai and consider the following questions:

-What does this book teach me about God?

-How does this book challenge me in my current situation?⁴

⁴ See Appendix 4

DAY 14: READ THROUGH ZECHARIAH

Read through Zechariah, remembering that he is a contemporary of Haggai and charged with the same task as preaching to the people as they are called to rebuild the temple. Ask these questions:

- How is the message of Zechariah similar to Haggai? Different?
- How does this book help me understand Haggai?

APPENDIX 1: Is My Suffering Due to My Sin?

Today there seems to be an aversion to the suggestion that some of our suffering may be due to our own sin. This is partly justified. We see the error of Job's friends, who believed Job's suffering was due to his sin (it was not). We hear other people's insensitivity by suggesting that a puzzling hardship may be due to some past sinful act (it may not be). We bristle at overly dogmatic statements that attribute individual or corporate suffering of others as the result of judgment for sinful acts (we can overstate and misspeak).

While there is much error in attributing a person's suffering to their own sin, we must not overlook this biblical truth: **some of our suffering may be due to our sin.**

Hearing Haggai 1

In Haggai 1, we see God speak through His prophet Haggai to a people who have not done the work they were called to do. After being back in the land for roughly 15 years—and after some initial progress followed by persecution (Ezra 4-5)—God's people still have not rebuilt the temple. The work has stalled out and excuses have been made: *'now is not the time to rebuild the temple'* (Haggai 1:2).

While the temple rebuild has been neglected, the people of Israel have had the time and energy to build their own homes (possibly luxurious homes [*"paneled"* 1:4]), and seek out their own economic and financial prosperity (harvests and wine and oil).

God speaks through his prophet Haggai and calls out the people's disobedience. They have neglected to do the good work God of rebuilding the temple because of their own self-centered and self-focused pursuits. Now is the time build the temple (1:8).

Moreover, the material and financial blessing they sought have been actively withheld by God, because the people's sinful neglect of rebuilding the temple (1:6, 9-11):

1:6: *"You 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."*

1:9-11 *"You 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. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce. And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors."*

Note that it is God HIMSELF who thwarted their attempts at financial prosperity: "I blew it away" [1:9]; "I have called for a drought on the land" [1:11]. And the reason is clearly stated in 1:9: "Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house."

The people of God in Haggai's day were suffering because of their sin. God was actively withholding blessing and bringing about a state of discipline for their sinful neglect of rebuilding the temple.

Is my Suffering Due to My Sin?

Some of our suffering as Christians may be a result of our sin—sins of commission (doing what we should not do) or sins of omission (not doing what we ought to do).

In James 4:3 we read, “*You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*” Here, we see the suffering of unmet desires and prayer requests. At times, God actively withholds from us—resulting in suffering—because our motivations are self-centered or ungodly.

Another example of Christians suffering due to sin is found in 1 Cor 11:27-32. Here we see that some believers were approaching “*the Lord’s Table in an unworthy manner*” (11:27) and as a result became weak, sick, or even died (11:30). This was a disciplinary judgment of God on the Corinthian congregation (11:31).

Some of our suffering as Christians, may be due to our unrepentant sin.

Not all Suffering Is Due to Our Sin

The Bible is clear that not all suffering is due to our own sin. Sometimes our suffering is the result of someone else’s sin: Achan’s sin led to suffering for the whole nation of Israel (Joshua 7). Sometimes our suffering is an affliction God grants us to test our faith and purify and refine us (James 1:2-4). Sometimes our suffering is an affliction God gives us to keep us humble and dependent upon Him (2 Cor 1:9; 12:8-9). Sometimes the reason for our suffering is not revealed to us, but God gets the glory as we trust Him and glorify Him through it.

Our Response to Suffering

The prophet Haggai called the people to “*consider your ways*” (Haggai 1:5, 7). This is what we ought to do amid suffering. We must consider our ways and ask, ‘Is there is some sinful act or attitude that I am refusing to repent of?’ And, ‘Is there is some action or attitude that I’m called to do or embrace but I am neglecting or refusing to do?’ These questions help us to consider our ways, and to repent, by God’s grace, and do the good works God has called us to do.

In our suffering, we look to Christ, the righteous sufferer, who never sinned, but enduring suffering for us through his death on the cross (1 Peter 2:21-25). Even in his suffering he did not sin (1 Peter 2:22). He is our Shepherd amid our suffering, and will lead us on paths of righteousness (Ps 23) as we repent and walk by faith.

Remembering God’s Kindness Even in our Suffering

Though some of our suffering may be due to our own sin, we rejoice that Christ paid the penalty for all our sins on the cross. Through him, we have forgiveness of sin (Col 1:14) and by faith in Jesus we are justified before God (Gal 2:16). His Holy Spirit leads us forward in holiness (Rom 8) and by His grace we do the good works God has called us to do, with the motivation that God would take pleasure in them and be glorified (Haggai 1:8).

We also remember God’s kind and good character even in the middle of our own suffering. Lamentations 3:31-33, a passage written in the midst of immense suffering by the prophet Jeremiah after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, instructs us:

Lamentation 3:31-33:

“For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.”

APPENDIX 2: The Beautiful Church and the More Beautiful Church

“He has made everything beautiful in its time.” (Ecc 3:11a)

The church is beautiful. Clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, she bears the splendor the God-Man. Filled with the Holy Spirit, her members display love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Marked by love for each other, she exudes a striking brilliance of a love not from this world. Working together in unity, she goes out and proclaims the good news of God’s grace, feeds the poor, and seeks to meet the needs of the lowly and weak. Despite what her critics say, the church is truly beautiful.

Her beauty is real, but clouded with the remnants of her old way of life. Her members use tongues to give thanks, but also at times also to gossip, slander, and complain. There is rejoicing and delight in God in her sanctuary, but also a battle against covetousness with many hearts. Worship of the one true God occurs, but sadly at times and worthless idols crowd out pure devotion to God. There are wonderful seasons where the world is impacted for good by her words and works, but then also sadly neglected.

The Church is beautiful but a more beautiful Church is coming. Jesus will return and bring in the fullness of His kingdom, along with a majestic new heavens and new earth. Then the beautiful church will become the more beautiful church. All unbelief will cease and a full trust in God will remain. Lust and perverse desires will be replaced by a holy hungering for righteousness and for God Himself. Lies and deceptions will disappear and God’s people will speak the truth—and only the truth—and always in love. Physical illness, pain, and darkness will give way to sinless glorified bodies, free from disease, death, and corruption.

This day will come and the glory of it put into perspective all the struggles and strife of this life (Rom 8:18). One day, the beautiful Church will become the more beautiful church.

APPENDIX 3: God's Blessings for our Obedience (Haggai 2:10-19)

One way that God motivates believers do what is right is by promising to bless their obedience. This truth is seen in the book of Haggai.

In chapter 1, God speaks through Haggai to a disobedient people—a people who were meant to rebuild the temple, but for the previous 15-18 years have instead focused on their own houses and self-interests. God tells the people that He has withheld material and physical prosperity because of their neglect of the temple (Haggai 1:9-11; 2:15-17). He calls them repent of their self-centered ways and rebuild the temple (1:8), and by His grace they respond (1:14) and began rebuilding the temple! After providing further encouragement to Israel (2:1-9), and after further obedience of the people (2:10), God promises to bless the people of Israel: “*from this day on I will bless you*” (2:19).

God withheld blessing when Israel disobeyed and poured out blessing when they obeyed. Readers of Haggai see this aspect of God's holy character. God is not indifferent to our heart, actions, and behavior, but commands obedience (in the heart and life) and by His grace and Spirit empowers obedience. And God blesses our obedience.

3 Important Clarifications

1 No one can earn the blessing of heaven or eternal life through their own obedience. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23) and the wages of our sin is death (Rom 6:23). Our only hope for eternal life is through the free gift of eternal life given to us in Christ and received by faith (Rom 10:9-10; Eph 2:8-9; Gal 2:16; John 3:16). Salvation is entirely a free gift, not earned by us.

2 God does not want us to obey merely to receive a blessing. We are not encouraged to have a ‘mercenary’ spirit whereby we prize the gifts of God more than God Himself. God desires us to want Him above the gifts and prize Him even as He withholds blessings and gifts.

3 There is an awe-inspiring wonder of God's grace and mercy, which is shown in how much He blesses us despite our disobedience. We are all heirs of so many good and wonderful gifts from God that He has poured out on us, even as we have sinned in a myriad of ways. Our God is a God of incredible grace!

Blessing for Obedience as One of Many Motivations to Obey God

Calvin, in His commentary on Haggai, speaks about how God has many ways to motivate obedience in His children. Blessing for obedience is just one ‘stimulus’ that God gives, and it one that He especially uses for believers who are ‘tardy or sluggish’ in obedience—like the Israelites in Haggai's day who for 15-18 years had not rebuilt the temple. For the believer struggling or slow to obey, God holds out the promise of blessing for obedience to help motivate and move forward in holiness. After this, God leads the believer to obey out of love, gratitude, fear of God, and other motivations.

I remember hearing a talk by Tim Keller speak about this. God gives us lots of reasons and motivations to obey and follow Him—and we need all the reasons and motivations we can get! Of course, we want to obey and follow God primarily because love and trust Him, but at times these other motivations can provide further stimulus and help as we face temptation, pressures to compromise, and difficulties to do what is right.

As a new Christian I especially was helped by the motivation of 'blessing for obedience.' When I gave in to old habitual sins, I experienced God's fatherly displeasure and discipline—often in the form of a feeling distant from God and other kinds of painful and uncomfortable experiences. When I walked by the Spirit and obeyed, I experienced a joy and delight in God and a closeness to Him. Over time, I have learned more to obey more often out of love and gratitude to God and out of the 'fear of the LORD,' but the motivation of 'blessing for obedience' has continued to help. I am a New Creation, I have the Holy Spirit, I want to do what is right because I love God and others, but remembering God as a Father who disciplines my disobedience and blesses my obedience has provided further support to me when I am slow to obey.

While we need to be nuanced in how we explain this, we should be afraid to encourage obedience for blessing. It is one of the many ways God uses to help us to follow and love Him.

APPENDIX 4: Suburban Christians: Let Us Hear the Message of Haggai!

Suburban Christians need to hear the message of Haggai. This neglected Old Testament book has incredible relevance for us, especially if we live in a comfortable, affluent suburb (like where I live: Naperville). Having just preached through book at our church, I've been freshly impressed as to the importance and relevance of Haggai for suburban Christians. Haggai challenges us to reconsider our priorities and move away from self-centeredness. Haggai encourages us to keep doing God's work, even when it feels small, slow, or insignificant. Haggai redirects our attention to a God who is mighty, rules over the nations, and promises a glorious future. All Christians need to hear these things, but especially suburban Christians.

HAGGAI CHALLENGES OUR SUBURBAN SELF-CENTEREDNESS

The people of Haggai's day had their priorities in the wrong place. After returning from Babylonian exile to the city of Jerusalem, they neglected God's task for them: rebuilding the temple. At the beginning of Haggai's ministry, the people had spent at least 15 years not rebuilding the temple; instead, they focused on rebuilding their own lavish [paneled 1:4] homes (Haggai 1:3-6). Granted, they did face some opposition which hindered their earlier attempts, but they never got back to their God-given task of temple rebuilding. The people chose self-interest over God. Now, through Haggai, God was calling them to "consider their ways" and get back to the task of rebuilding the temple. This was the good work they had to do (1:8).

We Christians who live in the affluent suburbs frequently need our priorities challenged. It is far too easy to choose the path of self-centered pursuits over the love of God and love of neighbor. We can so fill up our schedules with programs for our children, entertainment, distractions, and hobbies that we end up with no time to draw near to God or reach out to our neighbors. We can make the same mistake as God's people in Haggai's day. For this reason, Haggai is incredibly relevant to suburban Christians.

HAGGAI ENCOURAGES US WHEN OUR TASK FEELS SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT

By God's grace, the people in Haggai's day responded to the prophet's message and began rebuilding the temple (Haggai 1:12-15). In a remarkable display of repentance, the people got to work! But after a month and half or so, discouragement set in: the new temple was far smaller than Solomon's original temple (Haggai 2:3). It looked 'as nothing in the eyes' of the people (Haggai 2:3). Thankfully, God knew what the people were thinking and had a message of encouragement to give them: "Be Strong! I am with you" (2:4-9). These words from God brought needed encouragement to a people who felt as though their work was small, weak, and insignificant.

Our work as Christians in suburbia often feels small, weak, or insignificant. No matter how big our ministry or church is, the world can feel larger—and someone else always has a more visible or 'successful' ministry. Changing diapers, praying, going to small group, reading our Bibles, attending Sunday services, repenting of sin, and giving tithes can all feel small and insignificant. It is easy to get discouraged in the day-to-day obedience God calls us to in suburbia: the glories of the city, a foreign land, or remote time can sound far more exciting and meaningful. Yet, God is with us and our work here is important. God has 'good works' for us to do (Eph 2:10; Matt 28:18-20) and we are part of

God's eternal kingdom. Our work is part of God's grand design to establish His kingdom on Earth! Haggai helps us see this.

HAGGAI REDIRECTS OUR GAZE TO A FAR GREATER FUTURE GLORY

The people in Haggai's time were given promises of a far greater future glory. One day, God was going to "shake creation...and shake the nations" (2:6, 7, 21)—toppling earthly kingdoms and bringing in the kingdom of God. God would fill His temple with glory, and the latter glory would be greater than the former (2:9). These wonderful promises would have reoriented the Israelites: they could work hard and set their hearts on a far greater future glory, no matter what their eyes could presently see.

The glory which God promised in Haggai arrived in the person of Jesus—God Himself came to Earth (John 1:14-18). Jesus is the promised temple (John 2:19) and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). His death and resurrection defeated sin and death. He ascended into heaven and will one day return and then every knee will bow before him (Phil 2:9-11).

Christians in suburbia are waiting for the return of Jesus and the establishment of the new heavens and new earth. These are stunning future realities that have yet to arrive! We are like the people in Haggai's time: waiting for something far more glorious and better (Rom 8:18). Because a far greater glory is coming, we do not have to set our hearts on the glories of suburbia: the glory of a beautiful home or yard, the glory of successful children, the glory of a vacation home on a lake, the glory of excelling in our hobbies, and every other suburban glory. Haggai helps us remember and wait for this future glory.

Let us listen to Haggai again and allow its message to shape how we live as Christians in suburbia.