

ANCIENT WORDS FOR MODERN DISCIPLES

October 9, 2022 | Seeking God During the Daily Grind (Haggai)

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Have you ever or are you now experiencing a time when it feels like it takes all your energy just to get by day after day? Why is this a challenging way to live?

Read Haggai.

Ask God to use this lesson to reveal where you are “just getting by” spiritually.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God desired for the returning exiles to flourish spiritually, but they were too caught up in their daily struggle.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Spiritual growth requires an investment from you, but it will yield an unbelievable return.

MEDITATE

“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” (Haggai 2:9).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the prophet Haggai, his era, and the central idea of his book.

Q: *Haggai ministered after the Jews returned from exile. How does this ministry context differ from the other prophets we have encountered thus far?*

Q: *What is meant by the phrase “daily grind”?*

The book of Haggai is the beginning of a significant shift in the Minor Prophets. Each of the previous prophets ministered before the people of Judah were taken into exile. But in 586 BC they were conquered by the Babylonians, and for forty-six years Jerusalem was uninhabited and lay in ruins. The temple was demolished. The city’s walls were reduced to rubble. In 538 BC, the Persian king, Cyrus, allowed a small number of Jews to return to Jerusalem and resume normal life there.

It was an extraordinary moment for the people of God, but it also included many hardships. Life back in the land was very challenging. The people had no military protection from opportunistic outsiders and very few resources. They were essentially starting from scratch. In 537 BC, they began laying the foundations of a new temple building, but they made little headway before abandoning the project due to internal and external opposition.

One matter that will become evident as we move through Haggai is that the people were so overwhelmed by their daily tasks and responsibilities that they struggled to maintain an adequate spiritual life. The temple project had stalled, and there never seemed to be enough of anything to go around. We often use the expression “the daily grind” to describe the day-after-day struggle just to maintain where we are in life with little to no hope of getting ahead. The Jews who had returned from exile faced a daily grind unlike anything we have ever experienced.

Q: *What are some legitimate and illegitimate causes of the daily grind?*

Q: *Why does the daily grind make it difficult to thrive spiritually?*

APPLICATION POINT – The Jews who returned from exile felt that securing their basic daily needs demanded all their energy. They didn’t have time to think about the temple or worry about their personal holiness. Even though we are not returning exiles, our lives can often feel much like the lives of the people Haggai addressed. We share two problems of the “daily grind” with the returning Jews. First, we often fail to appreciate how vital a healthy spiritual life is for our existence. We easily become so consumed with our material needs that we forget

we are spiritual as well as physical beings. Second, there are times when the daily grind does not stem from basic needs but from uncontrolled greed and materialism. We get so caught up in the things everyone else has that we push ourselves to the limit to have them too. In doing so, we reveal that our true love is not God but material things.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+The structure of Haggai is very easy to recognize. The prophet gives four oracles, each of which begins with a date.

1. PRIORITIZE GOD
2. LIVE SACRIFICIALLY
3. FIND BLESSINGS IN GOD
4. FOCUS ON GOD'S CALLING

GOING DEEPER

+The Jews who returned from exile faced a daily grind that alienated them from God. Haggai addressed their situation in a way that also instructs us when we face our own daily grind. This section will look at each of Haggai's oracles.

1. PRIORITIZE GOD

■ HAGGAI 1

🔍: *Why was the temple significant for the people of God in the Old Testament?*

🔍: *How would the spiritual lives of the people be hampered by the absence of the temple?*

When the Jews returned from exile, they almost immediately began rebuilding the temple that was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. They had returned to the land God had promised to their ancestors and were enthusiastic about beginning again. Their zeal, however, quickly vanished as they became accustomed to life in their new home. The temple project was placed on the back burner and then essentially abandoned (Haggai 1:2).

The temple was of crucial importance for the people of God in the Old Testament. It represented God's presence with His people and the harmony between them (1 Kings 6:11–14; Psalm 132:12–16). If you want to understand the importance of the temple for the people of God in the Old Testament, look at Solomon's address and prayer of dedication on the day Israel celebrated the completion of the first temple (1 Kings 8). The temple showcased God's glory—for Israel and even for the other nations of the ancient world. Anyone who prayed to the God of this temple would receive His blessing. Furthermore, it was a sign of God's faithfulness to the promises He made to David (2 Samuel 7; 1 Kings 8:25–26). Solomon's temple was the center of Israel's culture, both spiritually and politically. There could be no higher priority for those returning from exile.

Q: *How is the idea of the temple developed in the New Testament?*

Q: *What are the implications of us being the temple of the Holy Spirit [1 Corinthians 6:19]?*

APPLICATION POINT –Haggai recognized the importance of the temple for the people of God. In the new covenant, there are several significant developments in the importance of the temple. First, the temple finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. The temple was the place where God's presence was found among man. In Christ, who is fully man and fully God, the presence of God dwells within a person (John 1:14; Colossians 1:19). Christ is the fullest expression of what the temple was meant to be. Second, when believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we become temples ourselves (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Finally, the church is understood to be a temple in which God dwells. Peter referred to believers as living stones that have been built into a spiritual house or temple (1 Peter 2:4–6). All the promise and hope Haggai saw in the incomplete temple is fulfilled in multiple ways in the new covenant. In the new covenant, the different ways in which the temple is fulfilled prioritize God in more ways than a physical building ever could.

Q: *Why couldn't the returned exiles finish building the temple?*

Q: *Why couldn't they provide enough for themselves?*

The returnees from exile faced extreme challenges in their new home. Life was not easy or even safe. Of course, they would have struggled with a building project as significant as the temple, but Haggai did not point to those challenges as the reason they did not complete the temple. They did not complete the temple because they were more interested building their own homes (Haggai 1:4). “Paneled houses” likely refers to expensive wood paneling used in luxurious houses. They thought building God’s house was too difficult, but they were willing to make sacrifices to build their own homes.

The people’s mindset was the exact opposite of what we encounter in the heart of David. David recognized the incongruity of living in a house himself while the ark of God dwelled in a tent (2 Samuel 7:1–3). God had not chosen David to build the temple, but David at least understood that God was more worthy of a house than he was.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the first chapter of Haggai is that the prophet argued that the people never had enough because they prioritized themselves over God. They had sown much but harvested little, eaten but had not been filled, been clothed but were still cold, earned wages but didn’t know where their money went (Haggai 1:6). The reason they never had enough was not because they did not work hard but because they did not prioritize God over themselves. They could work as hard as they wanted and not be able to provide for themselves because their provision was ultimately found in God, not themselves. In fact, God was working against them. Although the people should have been able to expect much, God had blown it all away (Haggai 1:9).

Q: *Do you struggle in prioritizing God over yourself? Have you seen the principle He suggests in Haggai 1:6 at work in your life?*

Q: *How does God do more to sustain you than you even realize [Colossians 1:17]? What keeps you from trusting God to provide for your needs?*

APPLICATION POINT – Many people who face a daily grind not because they must but because their expectations of their lifestyle demand it. Their eyes always want more, and to get more, they must keep doing more. For many

people, this pattern repeats itself to the point that they cannot enjoy the things they wanted because they must spend all their time grinding away to get them or pay for them. Of course, such people have disregarded their spiritual lives long ago. They have failed to prioritize God because they want everything the world has to offer. Haggai believed no matter how much they gain it will never be enough. Their own behavior bears this out.

❓: *What instruction is repeated in Haggai 1:5 and 7?*

❓: *How did the people respond to Haggai's call to repentance?*

Haggai's call to the people was simple. "Consider your ways." If they took some time to practice self-reflection, they would quickly see how they were prioritizing themselves over God. They would easily see the sinfulness of their behavior and repent.

Repentance does not come often for the people of God in the Old Testament. The greatest repentance seen thus far in our study of the Minor Prophets was not found among the Israelites but among the Ninevites (Jonah 3:6–9). But the people, beginning with the leadership, responded to Haggai's message with repentance (Haggai 1:12). As they responded to Haggai's message, God responded to them by promising His presence with them. God's presence with the people did not depend on the temple but upon their hearts. The people lay aside their distractions and prioritized building God's house (Haggai 1:14).

❓: *How often do you set aside time to reflect on the sins that have ensnared you?*

❓: *What tools can you use to help you "consider your ways"?*

APPLICATION POINT –Sin really isn't that hard to spot if you are committed to repenting from it. If it has been some time since you have "considered your ways," commit some time to do that this week. Consider reading the "sin catalogue" passages from the New Testament (Mark 7:21–23; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; 2 Timothy 3:1–5). It may also be helpful to look over recent sermon notes to consider ways you may be rebelling against God's perfect will. Of course, considering your ways does not mean merely identifying sin. It also means repenting from it. Some people think examining yourself and coming to grips with your sin is a negative or depressing thing, but Haggai did not seem to think so if it was accompanied by repentance. Repentance is the key

to experiencing God's presence (Haggai 1:13).

2. LIVE SACRIFICIALLY

■ HAGGAI 2:1-9

Q: *How does Ezra 3:12-13 help us understand Haggai 2:3?*

Q: *Why did Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people of the land need to be strong [Haggai 2:4]?*

A little more than a month and a half after Haggai's first oracle, the prophet again needed to address a situation arising among the people. The people had resumed work on the temple (Haggai 1:14), but certain older men were overcome with grief as they saw the temple taking shape. Though they were just boys when the first temple was destroyed, the memory of that building still occupied a place in their minds and hearts. They could not help but lament at the sight of the new building because its glory paled in comparison to the temple they remembered (Haggai 2:3; Ezra 3:12-13). For them, the new temple was a sad reminder of the toll the exile had taken upon the land and people.

Their disappointment would have undoubtedly been discouraging for Zerubbabel and the others working on the temple. Haggai did not rebuke these older men for their emotions or mislead the workers concerning the nature of the temple. Instead, he pointed everyone to the mercy of God. Although this was a meager temple, Haggai could foresee a day when it would be filled with the glory of the Lord. God would "shake" the nations, and they would flow to Jerusalem with offerings of silver and gold.

The fulfillment of Haggai's prophecy occurred over several stages and several unexpected changes. Haggai's prophecy was partially fulfilled when the Persian king, Darius, soon provided funds for working on this temple (Ezra 6:8-10). Haggai's words were never completely fulfilled for the temple built by Zerubbabel, which was completed in 515 BC. On multiple occasions, it was severely damaged as invading armies overtook Jerusalem. Zerubbabel's temple was eventually torn down to make room for the temple Herod built beginning in 20 BC. (This was the Herod who was king at the time of Jesus's birth.) Herod's funding to build another temple was again a partial fulfillment of Haggai's prophecy. The ultimate fulfillment of Haggai's prophecy is eschatological and centered on Christ. The Old Testament anticipated a time when God's glory would return to dwell among

His people (Ezekiel 43:1–7; 44:4). This was fulfilled at the incarnation when the glory of God was found in the man, Christ Jesus. People from all nations will flow to His kingdom (Revelation 5:9–10). We might be troubled that Haggai’s exact words were not fulfilled in the manner we would have anticipated, but Christian theology sees continuity and fulfillment between the temples and, ultimately, Christ. The fulfillment of Haggai’s prophecy is greater than those who received it would have anticipated.

Q: *What comfort would Zerubbabel and the others have taken from Haggai’s prophecy?*

Q: *Who did Haggai say would secure the glory of the temple?*

APPLICATION POINT – The people would have understandably been discouraged by how little their efforts amounted to, but Haggai showed them what God would do with it in the future. This shows us that the important thing to God is not the amount of money we give or the time we spend serving. What is important is the sacrifice we make for Him. God can take the sacrifices we make for Him and multiply them to display His glory. This was Jesus’s message concerning the poor widow who sacrificed from her meager funds to give an offering in the temple (Luke 21:1–4). There could be no better news for someone facing the daily grind. If you don’t have much to give, either of your time or money, God is able to take what you can sacrifice and multiply it for His glory. You only need to be faithful to make the sacrifice. At the same time, Haggai’s prophecy encourages us to back away from the daily grind. You do not have to work yourself to death! You will never be able to solve every problem, no matter how hard you push, but God can take what you can do and multiply it for His glory and for your provision.

3. FINDING BLESSINGS IN GOD

■ HAGGAI 2:10–19

Q: *In Haggai’s oracle, was holiness able to be transferred from one thing to the next? What is the significance of this for the people who were building the temple?*

Q: *What was happening to the people before they started building the temple?*

Haggai's first oracle is a bit enigmatic for modern readers. The prophet was making several important points concerning the temple, the people's disobedience, and God's blessing. One of the enigmatic elements of this passage is the idea of holiness versus uncleanness. These are priestly categories pertaining to a person's or object's suitability for coming near to God. You may be familiar with these categories from the book of Leviticus. Leviticus is also concerned with the implications a recently built sanctuary, in that case the tabernacle, had for God's people.

At the opening of Haggai, the people had given up rebuilding the temple. They believed it was too great a hardship, but their disobedience brought a greater hardship upon them from God (Haggai 1:6, 9; 2:15–17). Now that the people had resumed building the temple, God was ready to bless them again, but the people could not mistake the blessings they received as coming from the holiness of the temple. The temple could not make them holy and worthy of divine blessing. If anything, their uncleanness endangered the holiness of the temple. The act of building the temple is not what took away their hardships or secured their blessings. Instead, their blessings came from God as He responded to their obedience in resuming their work on the temple.

Q: *Why is it important to recognize that we cannot do anything to earn God's blessing?*

Q: *How does Haggai's message correspond to the gospel?*

APPLICATION POINT – Structures of works-based righteousness are heavily encoded into our nature. We naturally think we must do things to earn God's favor, but Haggai's oracles show us the foolishness of these thoughts. Just as something unclean cannot be made holy through contact with what is holy, we cannot earn God's blessing through good works. Our sin taints even our best deeds. We cannot earn God's blessings, but we can receive them as a gift of His grace. God may respond to our good works with blessing, but we should never think He does so because we have earned it.

This is soul-saving news for those who are oppressed by the burdens life has placed upon them. If you are in the midst of the daily grind, you don't have to do extra to receive God's blessing. In fact, the most important lesson you

could learn is that you can do nothing to earn God's favor. Following God is not another thing to add to your plate. Instead, you only need to learn to receive God's blessing through His grace. In doing so, you may find the freedom to let go of other burdens that are weighing heavily on your shoulders.

4. FOCUS ON GOD'S CALLING

■ HAGGAI 2:20-23

Q: *What is the meaning of the signet ring?*

Q: *What importance does Zerubbabel have in the New Testament [Matthew 1:1-17]?*

Zerubbabel was the leader of the first wave of Jews returning from exile to the promised land. He became the governor of the new settlement of Jews. At this point, the kingship over God's people would not be granted to an individual as it was from the days of the monarchy to the exile. Leaders such as Zerubbabel would arise, but no one was made king. Haggai, however, envisioned a day when God would "shake the heavens and the earth" (Haggai 2:21), when the thrones of the kings of the earth will be overthrown, and God would anoint His own king over His people. Haggai revealed that this king would come from Zerubbabel. Thus, Zerubbabel is like a signet ring. A signet ring is a royal ornament identifying the king. Although Zerubbabel was not the king, he functioned as the symbol identifying his line as the one from which the king would come. The New Testament reveals that Jesus was the descendent from Zerubbabel who would become king over God's people.

Q: *What duties would Zerubbabel have had as governor?*

Q: *In what ways are your commitments keeping you from following God's calling upon your life?*

As governor, Zerubbabel had many responsibilities. He was responsible for the leadership of God's people. He would have functioned as a judge and as head of state. He was the architect of the temple. Zerubbabel likely found it difficult to slow down. But none of this compared to what Haggai announced at the conclusion of his prophecy.

Zerubbabel represented God's king who would come to rule over all the nations of the earth. This was the preeminent role of Zerubbabel's life.

You will not be the representative of God's king, but God still has a significant mission for your life. Christians often refer to this as a "calling." The problem is that many people in churches are ignoring God's calling on their lives because they have taken on so many other responsibilities. They are caught up in the daily grind and pay little attention to what the Holy Spirit is prompting them to do for the sake of the gospel. Many of us recognize God's calling on our lives, but for some reason, we feel as though we must prioritize everything else that vies for our attention. We want to wait until we can focus on God's calling and give it more of our attention, but that day never comes. If your daily grind keeps you from following God's call on your life, you are robbing God of the dedication owed to Him.

NEXT STEPS

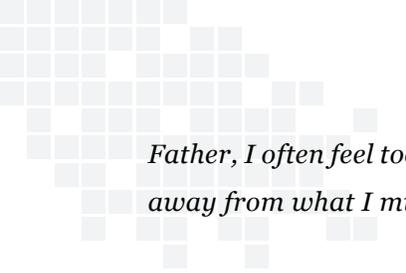
This lesson has drawn principles from Haggai to address Christians who are struggling to stay afloat spiritually amid their daily grind. Some of these principles are intended to help you prioritize God as you go through your daily grind. Other principles are intended to encourage you to step back from the things exhausting your physical, emotional, and spiritual energy. You must determine which these principles fits the path you need to take. For some, one of these paths may seem impossible, but that may be the clearest indication that it is the right one.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, forgive me for prioritizing myself, my comforts, and my desires over you. Help me keep you at the center of my life.

Lord Jesus, you are the king who will come to shake up the world! May I be found a faithful servant when you return.



Father, I often feel too worn down by life to think about my relationship with you. Give me the courage to step away from what I must to follow you as I should.

God, every blessing I have comes from you. I have done nothing to earn anything you have done for me. You have provided me with everything good in life. Help me to embrace the gospel of your grace so I may receive every good blessing from you.