

CONSIDER YOUR WAYS

It been said that one of the unsettling influences of an increasingly technological culture is that we do a lot of thinking but it is not careful thinking about the most important things. One author, Shane Hipps wrote a book titled *"Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith."* In this book the author comments that the Internet creates what he calls "a permanent puberty of the mind". We get an overwhelming flood of information, but there is too much information and not enough context or time or ability to sort that information meaningfully so it never turns into true wisdom or understanding. Like people caught in a flood that is just sweeping them farther and farther away from shore we are swept up in a churning flood of stimulation and factoids, and scattered stories without context. A cat gets caught in a sewer in Boston and we hear about it in Daytona. There is a protest in Bangkok and a gay pride parade in Moscow and we can watch it all in Daytona. A new species of frog has been found in Madagascar and you can see it online right here! There are a lot of facts at our fingertips but there is no stillness or time to absorb and meditate. Our minds are over stimulated and our hearts under nourished. We scurry along from task to busy task, and fascinating fact to interesting gossipy story but we don't take time to reflect on life's deeper and more important priorities..

One phrase I mentioned last week is found twice in the verses we just read but it occurs three more times also (2:15 and 18). It's the phrase that first shows up in **verse 5** and again in **verse 7**, "*Consider your ways.*" In the Hebrew it is literally "*set your heart on your ways.*"

I. IT IS GOOD TO CONSIDER OUR WAYS BECAUSE WE CAN EASILY LOSE THE CLARITY OF OUR PURPOSE WHILE DEALING WITH DEMANDING CIRCUMSTANCES.

As I said last week, after a time of exile and upheaval God brought his people back to rebuild their lives and to rebuild the house of the LORD. The temple was to stand in their midst as a holy symbol of God's presence in their lives their allegiance to God. God would meet with

them and bless them there as they worshipped and they would please and glorify him. We also saw, from multiple Scriptures, that what the temple was for them then, the church is for us today. Well, they had started to build the temple but they had some difficulty and opposition and got discouraged. God's priorities slipped into the background. They began to focus on their lives and their houses.

It is easy to become so comfortable putting off what God is calling us to do that we just go on living our own lives. We start serving God with lip service and leftovers. It had been about fifteen years since the difficulties that discouraged them came up. Instead of the beautiful temple Haggai sees heaps of rubble overgrown with weeds. Instead of the sound of praise he hears the grumbling of the people. Then, the Word of the Lord comes to Haggai! Haggai says in effect; *"This is what the LORD Almighty says, You are telling yourself that it isn't the right time to be focused on God's work and God's house but is it the right time to be focused on your own house and your own purposes? You're down at Lowe's and Home Depot looking for new cabinets, browsing the Pottery Barn dreaming about your house but there is something God wants built that lies neglected. Think about it! You live like this and wonder what's wrong?"*

The danger of talking like this is that you catch innocent people in your sights and they go away wounded. What Haggai was describing wasn't true of everyone. It never is. There are people who are putting God first, committed to building his house, the church, working hard but just going through tough times and a sermon like this can come across as adding unjustified condemnation. The Bible is full of stories in which faithful people endure the testing of their faith.

Not all of our problems are our own making but when difficulties come it is wise to consider our ways. I don't think our major problem is that we are spending too much time in prayerful thoughtful reflection on our lives. One of the overlooked benefits of a regular, daily rhythm of reading and reflecting on Scripture or coming together for worship, reaching and communion is these can be times for taking stock, doing a spiritual inventory, a review of your life in a spirit of prayerful consideration that can lead to much needed changes even when they are just small but important adjustments. **Psalm 139:23-24** says

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Illustration: In some ways the command to consider your ways can sound frustrating because you don't know what you don't know so how do you figure it out? If you give me a book written in Vietnamese, telling me to think harder doesn't help me understand the language. This is actually a clue that when God says, "Consider your ways," he isn't asking us to figure out what we can't understand. He is calling us to face up to what we actually know. It means quit ignoring what a little bit of reflection would reveal! Set your heart on *your* ways and think.

II. IT IS GOOD TO CONSIDER OUR WAYS BECAUSE, AT LEAST SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WE FACE MAY BE BECAUSE OF THINGS WE ARE NOT DOING BUT SHOULD BE DOING.

In **verses 5-11** two consequences are pictured in Haggai which came from their failure to consider their ways and do what they needed to do.

The first one is,

A. Dissatisfaction with the way things are working out for you.

Verses 5-6, *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.* Later the point will be a little different but here the point is about dissatisfaction. God says it is possible to have food and drink and clothing but not be satisfied, to have money but it is as if all you earn goes into a pocket with holes!

Malcolm Muggeridge was a famous British journalist who came to faith in Christ in his later years. As he looked back on his life he wrote:

“When I look back on my life nowadays, which I sometimes do, what strikes me most forcibly about it is that what seemed at the time most significant and seductive, seems now most futile and absurd. For instance, success in all of its various guises; being known and being

praised; ostensible pleasures, like acquiring money or seducing women, or traveling, going to and fro in the world and up and down in it like Satan, exploring and experiencing whatever Vanity Fair has to offer. In retrospect all these exercises in self-gratification seem pure fantasy, what Pascal called licking the earth.” 1

Verses 7-8; *Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. 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. Consider your ways because maybe some of the dissatisfaction you experience is due to looking for satisfaction in the wrong things while neglecting the things that glorify and please the LORD.*

The second consequence is slightly different but related...

B. Discipline from God that Frustrates Our Expectations.

Verses 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. 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.” Notice, they expected much. Why? Because they were working hard. They weren't idle.*

Do you ever think God ought to be helping you more because you are working so hard? Imagine you are going on a one-week vacation but you have a leaky faucet. You call a friend who is a home improvement handyman to come over and give you an estimate. He quotes a price on a three-hour job and you give him the keys and head out. You come back a week later and the faucet still leaks but the interior of the house has been painted and there is a bill for 50 hours work! You never asked your friend to paint your house and you sure don't want to pay him for fifty hours work. What would you think if he got mad because he worked so hard and you still aren't happy? I've sometimes gotten put out with God because I've felt I was working so hard but just being continually frustrated only to discover in the midst of my frustration that

I was working hard at things God had never actually asked me to do while neglecting the things he had clearly called me to do. *Consider your ways! For whom and what are you working?*

And as you think about that notice this; God isn't asking all these people or you to quit our work in the world and become priests and prophets. He is expecting them to go on working their jobs in the world of homes, and crops, wine and oil and cattle but he also expects them to be building the things that matter most to him. He expects you to be living your life *with* and *for him* no matter what your calling or circumstances in life.

III. WE NEED TO CONSIDER OUR WAYS SO WE CAN BRING OUR LIVES INTO HEALTHY ALIGNMENT WITH GOD.

Verse 12, says *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.*

A. Our lives come into alignment with God when we listen to him!

The Hebrew word “to obey” also means to listen. The Scriptures teach us that *no one has truly listened to the Word of God unless they obey and no one can truly obey unless they first listen.* But, I think the word “listen” has more relational power. The purpose of considering our ways but that we do so in a speaking and listening relationship with God. And of course having listened to him we obey.

Verse 12 also says they “*feared the Lord*”.

B. Our lives come into alignment with God when we reverence him.

When the Bible speaks of the “*fear of the Lord*,” it is calling for a heartfelt recognition of God's awesomeness, the holiness, the majesty the greatness and the goodness of God. Our hearts are made for awe and reverence. As John Piper says “*We are all starved for the glory of God, not self. No one goes to the Grand Canyon to increase self-*

esteem. Why do we go? Because there is greater healing for the soul in beholding splendor than there is in beholding self.”

I recently saw where a researcher named Christian Smith wrote a book titled *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. His research showed that the primary things teens pray about are their own wants and wishes. They want their problems fixed. That's somewhat understandable. But he also found that for many if not most teens that was pretty much it when it came to God. He was there to solve problems. There was little or no sense of wonder or admiration for who he is. Their prayers lacked any sense of repentance on the one hand or adoration toward God on the other. ² That's just sad because without reverence obedience lacks the uplifting beauty of devotion. I wonder how many adults pray without repentance or adoration. These people feared or revered the LORD because he had brought them back from exile and captivity and then spoke to them to call them up into his work.

We've had God speak to us even more powerfully and beautifully. **Hebrews 1:1-2** says, *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.* We read the call to reverence on the other side of the story of Jesus. What that means is that this Lord that we are called to obey and fear has revealed himself as awesome not only in his majesty and authority but also and especially in His love and compassion. How awesome that the God who made us became one of us. Some of you have suffered hard things. You need to know that he suffered also: the difficulties of his life, the agony of his temptations and his struggle in the garden and the brutality of his murder. God the Lord has identified *with us* in our suffering and our struggles. He not only suffered with us but he suffered *for* us. He came to save a kingdom of redeemed people. For our redemption and salvation he paid the penalty for sin and rose again from the dead. He says, "If you come to me, and trust in me, I will give you life and forgiveness and eternity and myself!" He freely gives you what you could never earn or deserve. Does that love that he shows you mean that you reverence him less because he is so loving and merciful? No! If you understand

the heart of God, the truth of the gospel you will not for that reason reverence God less.

Renewal begins when we renew obedience and also reverence. And there is great encouragement for that...

C. When our lives are in alignment with God he helps us in the work we do for him.

1. God assures us of his presence. Look at **verse 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." The people had not actually begun the work! But God looks at our hearts and immediately promises his presence! And it is not that we should think of this is a strictly transactional or legal sense as if God is saying You give me your obedience and I'll reward you with my presence but rather that God says this is where I am! This is where I am moving and working. This is the path down which I am walking; only when you step onto my path with a listening ear and heart of reverence can you find the support and enjoyment of my presence with you in your walk.

Repentance renews God's presence and

2. God works from within us to enable us. Verses 14-15

And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, 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. This is why we consider our ways! It's not to bury ourselves in guilt and dry duties. It is to free ourselves from blindness and spiritual inertia so we can give ourselves to God and he can work in and through us for our good and his glory, by his Spirit.

CONCLUSION

In the days of Haggai there was a temple to be built. What is it in your life that God is calling you to build or do? Prayerful, humble, reflection on our ways in light of the word of God is always a good thing. You cannot control other people or most circumstances so set your

heart to your ways, Consider your ways in your family, your marriage, with your children, in your friendships, with your free time, your priorities.

One thing God calls us all to work to build is his church. This is not the only application of Haggai but it is important. *Of course, the church is not a physical structure that has been knocked down into ruins by the Babylonian army.* But the principle that remains is this: God cares deeply about his house, his holy temple. The church is the spiritual fulfillment of everything the temple represented in Haggai's day. We don't mean the building, but the gathered community.

The apostle Peter says we are all like living stones being built into a spiritual house by God the Holy Spirit. The church has not been ruined but it has suffered. In many places in recent years the churches have been in decline. Many church members have been distant, inconsistent or absent. It doesn't have to be that way and it shouldn't be. God is still able to work in everyday people by His Holy Spirit to build and beautify his church. The apostle Paul wrote **1 Corinthians 14:12** and taught us to *try to excel in gifts that build up the church.* God calls us to build his church with a depth of love, true servanthood, strong teaching, and heart-felt worship, and faithful witness.

Maybe there is some very specific thing in *your* life or maybe it is your whole life that God wants rebuilt! Look at the active words in **verse 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.* If you do the things God wants you to do to glorify and please him don't you believe he will be with you in those things? Where is it that God is saying to you *"I want you to do this thing, I want you to go, to build, to begin, and I want you to know that I will be with you in the work you set out to do for me!*

Amen

Confession of Faith

1 Peter 2:4-6

⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Ephesians 2:18-22

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,^[c] but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by^[c] the Spirit.

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

Almighty God, I have often rendered harsh judgments on others while failing to prayerfully consider my own ways. Forgive me LORD. Open my eyes to see Christ as the Savior and only cornerstone for a church of redeemed sinners. I thank you that Christ died for my sins and rose again as my Savior. I turn to and trust in him alone for my redemption. Thank you for making me a living stone placed by grace in your house and indwelt by your Spirit forever. Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

LORD of hosts, Search me as I consider my ways before you. What do you want me to begin or to build, to change or correct? Deepen and strengthen my understanding of your church as a holy temple, made of living stones fit together by your grace and indwelt by your Spirit. Help me to see how I can strengthen your church for your pleasure and glory.

1 <https://www.inspiringquotes.us/author/7140-malcolm-muggeridge/about-earth>

2 *Adapted from Tim Keller, Prayer (Dutton, 2014), page 294*