

# Reboot

## 2. Regain Perspective

June 13, 2021

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Text: Haggai 2:9

Sometimes our priorities show up in funny ways. One day, New Jersey resident Marie Murphy got a call informing her that her house was on fire. [Photo shown on the big screen.] She was a teacher, and she dropped everything to rush to the scene. She quickly learned that her husband and her mother were both safely out of the house. But then Murphy *ran back into the burning house* to save her most prized possession.

Risking death, Marie fought her way through the smoke and flames in order to save her -- season tickets to the Philadelphia Phillies. Yes. Fortunately, she and her baseball tickets made it out in time before everything else she owned went up in flames. The Murphys were forced to live in a motel for some time after the blaze, but insurance covered their losses. And Marie was surprised when the Phillies mascot showed up at her school to give her some Phillies merchandise, including a framed World Series Ticket. [Photo shown on the big screens.] So, everything turned out well in the end. But I have to wonder if her husband said, "Marie -- what were you THINKING?" After all, the Phillies would have gladly reprinted her tickets if they had burned in the fire.

We each have our priorities, don't we? Our priorities will show up in what we sacrifice for -- what we protect, how we spend our time and our money. And our priorities matter because they determine the future of our lives and the quality of our character. In a real way, **our priorities shape our future.**

Our lives today reflect our priorities yesterday, and what we pursue today will shape our lives tomorrow. As we reboot our lives coming out of the pandemic, our priorities will determine how much we will experience God's best for our lives as individuals and as a church. So, it's not surprising that through the scripture, God often speaks to us about our priorities. One of those places is in the book of Haggai. Please turn with me there. Haggai is a short book toward the end of the Old Testament (though if you have a Bible app, it's a lot easier to find.) Haggai was a prophet in Israel around the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Haggai's message? **Seek God's presence above all else.** Here's the backstory on his ministry.

Decades before Haggai, God allowed the Babylonians to conquer Israel. They totally destroyed Jerusalem and took the people captive. [Map shown on the big screens.] So, the Israelites lived in exile in Babylon for around 70 years. This was not a shock to anyone who had been paying attention. For hundreds of years, the prophets had been warning Israel that's what would happen if they didn't stop worshiping idols. But the people didn't listen, so they were exiled from the land God had given to their ancestors. After about 70 years of exile, the Persians conquered Babylon and decided to let the Israelites return home. They would still have to live under Persian rule, but they could rebuild. So, they returned to Jerusalem and started work on the temple right away. But after about nine months, they stopped. No one knows why. Yet, they built other things. They rebuilt the city walls so they could be protected from invaders. And they rebuilt their homes. Housing developments sprang up all over the place. Not just

shacks. Many were luxury homes with expensive wood paneling and gardens around the house. But as their houses grew more splendid, the temple of the Lord was forgotten and grew more dilapidated. God saw that and said through Haggai, **Haggai 1:2-4** *This is what the LORD Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house.’” Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”*

The people neglecting to rebuild the temple was a major issue because the temple was not just another building. It wasn't just a building to show respect to God. It wasn't even just a place for the people to gather to worship God like a church building is today. **The temple was where God's presence dwelt.**

When the Israelites were wandering in the desert, the presence of God went ahead of them as a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of smoke by day. And after they settled in the Promised Land, the presence of God was centered in the temple – in a small room called the Holy of Holies on the ark of the covenant. So, the bottom line is: **No temple, no presence of God.**

The people said, “One of these days we'll get to rebuilding the temple, when the time is right, just not right now.” In other words, they were okay without the presence of God. Their highest priority was their comfort, not knowing God's presence. Haggai's message: **make seeking God's presence the highest priority.** But the Israelites were not. In a way, they had made an idol out of their home and rebuilding effort. So, God sent a prophet named Haggai to bring the people back to him. Notice even when we aren't seeking God, God is seeking us.

Through Haggai, the Lord tells the people to notice that making earthly comfort their priority wasn't even paying off materially. *<sup>5</sup>Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>6</sup>You have planted much but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.” <sup>7</sup>This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. “Give careful thought.”* God's saying, “What are you THINKING??” The people weren't noticing that they were working hard but not getting ahead. God said, **Haggai 1:9** *“You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?” declares the LORD Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house.”*

God was not letting them prosper. But this was not a punishment. It was a mercy. If the people had greater prosperity, they might have been too content with the temporary comfort to pay attention to the eternal. And God wasn't going to let his people keep cruising down the road to ruin.

Hundreds of years later, Jesus commented on priorities when he said, **Matthew 16:26** *What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?* Our priorities matter. The good news is that the leaders and the people listened to the prophet! **Haggai 1:14-15** *They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.* The people obeyed God and got to work rebuilding the temple. And when they did, their relationship with God flourished. And so did their bank accounts.

In Haggai 2, God gives them an amazing promise about the rebuilt temple.

**Haggai 2:9** *The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place, I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty.*" The people needed to hear this promise because their rebuilt temple didn't measure up to the original one. It was smaller and simpler because the returning Israelites didn't have the money to rebuild the temple the way it used to be. The people felt deflated about that. Yet God said the glory of the second temple would be GREATER than the glory of the first.

**"Glory" = display of God's presence.** Glory is the brilliance of God's presence, the weightiness of it, how we perceive it. To say the second temple's glory would be greater is saying a lot, because the first temple was glorious both physically and spiritually. Listen to what happened when the first temple was dedicated: **2 Chronicles 7:1** *When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. <sup>3</sup>When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "He is good; his love endures forever."* Wow! That display of God's was amazing! But that display didn't repeat itself when the temple was rebuilt.

So, in what way was the rebuilt temple's glory greater? It was greater because eventually Jesus – God in the flesh -- walked the courts of that temple. The presence of God appeared in a physical way in the temple. *And* after the Spirit fell upon the disciples at Pentecost, the early church assembled in that temple's courts. Thousands of disciples, each aflame with the Spirit of God, assembled as the Church began. That was a greater glory!

About two months ago, I was reading Haggai during my private worship time, and I sensed it was a promise of God for us at Crossroads. **Haggai 2:9** *The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place, I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty.*" I believe that is God's promise for us as individuals and as a church. Let me share just a little bit of what I sensed God showing me.

Through COVID, we were each exiled from our normal life. Now that it's winding down, it's time for us to rebuild. We are rebuilding our relationships, rethinking our priorities, regaining our emotional balance, and getting a grip on our finances. The promise of **Haggai 2:9** is that when we seek God's presence in this season, we will experience even more glory than before.

The latter glory will be GREATER in our lives, both as believers and as a church. The presence of God will be stronger in our lives and in our life together than it ever has been before -- if we seek it. **To claim the promise of greater glory: Refuse to be satisfied with material comfort.** Prosperity and comfort can be either a blessing or a curse -- which one depends on what we hunger for the most.

Ethiopia was under Communist rule from 1987 to 1991. During the time, the church was severely persecuted. One Ethiopian pastor with powerful ministry was targeted by the government. At one point, soldiers invaded a service where he was preaching and brutally killed his daughter. His wife gathered their lifeless daughter in

her arms and continued to worship God. The pastor was not deterred. He went on to lead a movement of hundreds of thousands of people in cell groups.

Once, an American denominational leader was talking with him and tried to be gracious by showing sympathy. He told the Ethiopian pastor, "Brother, we pray for you in your poverty." The humble pastor turned to the American and said, "No, you don't understand. We pray for you in your prosperity." That surprised the denominational leader. The pastor said, "We pray for you Americans because it's much harder for you to live at the place God wants you to live in the midst of prosperity than it is for us in the midst of our poverty."

It's not easy to be hungry for God's presence when surrounded by so much of what the world offers. There are so many distractions. But those who hunger after God's presence, who seek him – creating time and space in their lives to go after him -- they will experience a greater glory than ever. As the pandemic ebbs away, let's pursue God's presence even more.

I'm seeing a growing number of Crossroaders who are hungry for God. For example, last month 20 people gathered at the Ohio Valley building to pray for six hours for the Lord to work in deep ways in us. That's hunger for God. Each Saturday morning, others are gathering online to pray for our area. There's a new network of people in East Liberty praying for the city. Some are meeting God in service. In the late winter, Crossroaders showed up in freezing weather to distribute food to people who needed it. They made it a priority to demonstrate that God was present in a time of need. God goes where he's wanted. How much is he wanted in your life? How hungry are you?

Let's not be satisfied with physical comfort when we can know the glory of the presence of God to transform our desires and make us like Jesus. One moment in the presence of God is greater than anything this world can offer. Here's what I notice. When we are seeking God's presence, we'll gather with his people. Before Jesus arrived, the presence of God dwelt in the temple. After the Spirit came at Pentecost, that changed. **1 Corinthians 3:16** *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?* This tells us that the Spirit of God now dwells not just in us individually, but in the midst of the gathered people of God. And Jesus said, *"Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."* (Matthew 18:20) When seeking God is our priority, we gather with other believers, both in large group worship and small group settings. Because God's Spirit dwells *"in our midst."* Isolation is spiritually deadly. If we aren't engaged in community with other believers, we'll experience less of God's presence, gradually grow weaker, and fade out spiritually. We'll be sitting ducks for deception, discouragement, and disobedience. That's why I'm so pleased that every week I'm seeing more people returning to in-person worship for the first time. They are rebuilding spiritually. If there are reasons you *can't* gather with others in person, be encouraged. God will meet you as you seek him where you *can*. Worship online. Connect to a group online. If you are seeking, you will experience his great glory.

Israel rebuilt the temple after their exile, and most churches in America are in some degree of rebuilding after COVID. And Crossroads is no exception. As our staff is focused on rebuilding, our goal is a greater glory. For example, as a church, we have always equipped believers. Glory! Now, we're equipping at even greater levels, like

with the Movement Makers opportunity starting this fall. (Let us know if you'd like more information.) Greater glory! Crossroads has always served our community sacrificially. Glory!

In this new era, we'll be inviting our unreached neighbors to serve with us, and many will come to faith in Jesus. Greater glory! We're rebuilding our serving teams, KidZone and student ministry teams, our worship teams for greater glory. We have prayed as a church before, but today, there's a new wave of people praying for outpourings of God's Spirit that will change our region. Greater glory! And it all starts with seeking God's presence above all else in our lives.

At one point, the Israelites changed from saying, "One of these days we'll seek God's presence" to declaring, "Now is the time." And they experienced God's greater glory. Friends, now is the time for us to seek after God's presence. Now is the time. If you are pursuing Jesus, you have chosen what is best! Keep him your first priority and seek his presence. You will be rewarded. If during COVID other priorities have crowded out your hunger for God's presence, today is the day to declare you will seek his presence above all. Today can be the seedbed for a greater move of God than ever.