

## **How to Use Sermon Resources**

- **READ AHEAD TOGETHER** - MCG's should use the Devotional at the end of this resource as a reading plan for the week leading up to your meeting.
- **SIT UNDER THE WORD** - This resource is filled with scripture references. Read them aloud, together before you answer any questions.
- **APPLY TRUTH** - The goal is deep discussion and application, not necessarily to complete this resource. Don't squash a good discussion. If you get into something important along the way that's fine.

## **Small Group Discussion Guide**

**Opening Prayer** [ 2 mins ]

**Use the Overview** [ 5 mins ]

- Cover any key points for people who missed parts or all of the sermon

**Scripture Deep Dive** [ 30-40 mins ]

- Opening Question
- Read the scripture for each question then ask the question. Some have multiple scriptures.

**Close in Prayer**

- In this extended prayer time, ask others to pray as they feel led, pray in a circle, pray over one another, pray to your left, or pray for someone specific. Whatever seems best.

**Split Time (if applicable)**

- Men with men, women with women
- Share in a circle. "What's one thing you want to celebrate? What do you need prayer and accountability for?"
- After everyone shares, pray in a circle for the person to your left/right.

# **SERMON OVERVIEW**

## **Return: Haggai**

### **Sermon Summary:**

Drawing from the book of Zechariah, this sermon addresses the painful distance that often exists between what people expect from life and what they actually experience. Set in the historical context of the Jewish people returning from Babylonian exile, Zechariah delivers a four-part message that remains relevant today: return to God through confession and repentance, trust God even when circumstances seem overwhelming, demonstrate that trust through genuine obedience rather than mere religious activity, and hold onto hope by fixing your eyes on the promised Messiah.

### **Key Points:**

- God consistently calls his people to return to him through confession and repentance, just as he did through Zechariah in the opening verses of the book
- The eight visions of Zechariah collectively serve as an encouragement that God has not forgotten his people and can be trusted in every circumstance, including when enemies seem more powerful, when the scope of God's work exceeds human imagination, and when wickedness appears to go unchecked
- God desires the heart behind religious activity, not merely the activity itself, and warns against fasting, worship, or any spiritual practice that has become empty routine or self-pity rather than genuine pursuit of him
- Zechariah contains more prophecies about the first and second coming of Jesus than all other minor prophets combined, including the humble king riding on a donkey, the shepherd betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, the pierced one, and the shepherd who was struck

### **Scripture Reference:**

- Zechariah 1-14

### **Stories:**

- Pastor Matt describes planning family trips to amusement parks, building up an ideal vision of a perfect day with no lines, perfect weather, and easy parking, only to arrive and find long lines, distant parking, and expensive food, illustrating the gap between expectation and reality that the returning exiles experienced
- Pastor Matt recounts a childhood memory of his father asking his mother "are you ready to leave?" at a social gathering, using it as an example of a question that is actually a statement, applied to the people of Bethel asking whether they still needed to fast
- A young boy reading a cowboy book with his grandfather, who, frightened by a dangerous turn in the plot, flips immediately to the last page, reads the ending, and hands the book back saying the situation looks bad now but it works out all right, serving as an illustration that believers already know how the story of history ends and can therefore face present hardship with hope

# Scripture Deep Dive

## Opening Question

1. Think of a time when something you expected to go one way turned out very differently. How do you personally manage expectations for your life in light of God's sovereign plan?

## Return to God

2. **Read Zechariah 1:1–6; James 4:8–10** — In Zechariah 1, God says, “Return to me...and I will return to you.” Based on these passages, what does genuine returning to God require: regret, confession, changed direction, humility, or all of these? Which evidence from the verses supports your answer?

## Trust God

3. **Read Zechariah 3:1–10; Romans 8:33–34; Revelation 12:10–11** — Joshua stands accused while wearing filthy clothes, but God removes his iniquity and clothes him cleanly. According to these passages, who has the final authority over guilt: Satan the accuser, our past sin, or God? How does the text prove that answer?

4. **Read Zechariah 4:1–10; Ephesians 3:20–21; Philippians 1:6** — Zechariah's vision teaches that God supplies what is needed for His work. Which is the better conclusion from these verses: God's work depends mainly on human strength, or God's power enables faithful obedience? What phrase from the passages makes that clear?

## Obey God

5. **Read Zechariah 7:4–14; Isaiah 58:1–9; Matthew 15:7–9** — The people practiced fasting, but God questioned whether it was truly for Him. According to these passages, what makes religious activity unacceptable to God: the activity itself, the heart behind it, or the lack of justice and obedience connected to it? Explain which answer best fits the texts.

## Hope in God

6. **Read Zechariah 9:9; 12:10; 13:7; Matthew 21:1–11; John 19:34–37; Matthew 26:31** — Zechariah points forward to the Messiah through specific prophecies fulfilled in Jesus. After reading these passages, which fulfilled prophecy gives the strongest reason to trust God's future promises, and why?