

this week's big idea

God's discouraged people could keep building because he gave them his presence for strength and his promise to sustain their work.

getting started

Think of a project — at work, at home, in a relationship, in your faith — that started with energy and then stalled once it got hard or didn't seem to amount to much. What kept you going, or what made you stop?

in the text

Read Haggai 2:3-9 aloud together

Observation

1. In verse 4, how many times does God say “be strong,” and to whom? Then find the one command he gives to all of them together. What is it?
2. Verses 4-5 give a reason to keep going. What does God promise, and what moment in Israel's past does he point back to?
3. In verses 6-9, list everything God says “I will” do. Then compare verse 9 with verse 3. Which words does God repeat, and how does his answer replace the people's “nothing”?

discussion questions

4. Read Ezra 4:4–5. The last time they built, the neighbors set out to “discourage” them and make them “afraid.” God answers with “be strong” and “do not fear.” Where are you discouraged, or afraid, in something God has put in front of you?

5. Read 1 Chronicles 28:20. David spoke almost the same words to Solomon when he handed him the plans for the first temple. The people were comparing their house with Solomon’s, and God gives them Solomon’s charge. Where do you measure your work against someone else’s, and what does it mean that God gives you the same promise he gave them

6. On Sunday we said Nike says, “Just do it,” but God says, “Do it, for I am with you.” What is the difference between strength that comes from willpower and strength that comes from God’s presence? Where have you been trying to run on willpower alone

7. Read 1 Corinthians 2:9–12. Paul says God has revealed by his Spirit what “no eye has seen,” and that we have received what God has “freely given us.” How does knowing that the promise is already given change the way you keep going when you can’t see the outcome?

8. November 1 is Baptism Sunday. If you have never been baptized, what would it take for you to take that step? Who is one person you could invite to come and see what God is building?

praying the scriptures

In your group, use a simple “check-in”: go one individual at a time in brief fashion (1–2 minutes per person) to say one thing you are thankful for, and one thing you want prayer for. The person to your left listens to your check-in and then briefly prays for you out loud. Then it’s their turn to “check-in” and receive prayer from the person to their left. Continue the process until everyone has participated. For greater efficiency in large groups, divide in half or consider praying in triads.

1. “Be strong... and work” (v. 4). God says “be strong” three times, once each to the governor, the high priest and the people, then gives one command to them all: “and work.” David gave the same charge to Solomon (1 Chronicles 28:20)
2. “When you came out of Egypt” (v. 5). God roots his promise “I am with you” in the covenant he made at the exodus. It was first renewed after the golden calf (Exodus 33:15), to people who had just failed.
3. “The desired of all nations” (v. 7). The KJV and the Advent hymn hear the Messiah; most scholars read the nations’ treasure, which verse 8 names as silver and gold. Either way, the glory that fills this house leads to Jesus (John 1:14).

Background

This word came on the same day as last week’s questions: the twenty-first day of the seventh month, 17 October 520 BC, the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles. For a week the people had been living in shelters made of branches, because God commanded it “so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt” (Leviticus 23:43). So when God says, “This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt” (2:5), they are sitting in the very booths that remember that journey.

“My Spirit remains among you” (2:5) is literally “my Spirit is standing in your midst”, the word used of the pillar of cloud “standing at the entrance to the tent” (Exodus 33:10). The promise began to come true within a few years: Darius paid the building costs “so that the work will not stop” (Ezra 6:8), and the temple was finished in 516 BC (Ezra 6:14–15)