A dream
WORTH BUILDING

week 7
group study guide

this week's big idea

From the day the people turned back to him, God promised to bless them, before there was any fruit to show for it.

getting started

Think of a date that split your life into before and after. What changed that day, and how long was it before anything looked different?

in the text

Read Haggai 2:15–19 aloud together.

Observation

1. Count how often Haggai says "give careful thought" (vv. 15, 18) and "from this day on" (vv. 15, 18, 19). What does he want the people to look at?

2. Do the math in verse 16. A heap of twenty gives ten; a vat of fifty gives twenty. Compare 1:6. How long had the people lived this way?

3. In verse 17, who does God say was behind the blight, mildew and hail? And what was missing from the people's response?

4. Read Amos 4:6–12, which Haggai echoes. What was God waiting for each time? Amos ends, “prepare to meet your God” (4:12). How does Haggai end instead (2:19)?

5. On Sunday we said, “Not every hard season is this… but sometimes God uses hardship to get our attention.” Why hold both halves of that sentence (see John 9:1–3)? Has a hard season ever turned you toward God?

6. It is December. The sowing is done and the seed is in the ground; the barn is empty and the trees are bare (v. 19). Yet God says, “From this day on I will bless you.” Why might God promise blessing before there is anything to show for it? Where are you waiting to see fruit right now?

7. Read Mark 5:21–43. Under the law, both the woman (Leviticus 15:25–27) and the dead girl (Numbers 19:11) would make unclean anyone who touched them. What happens when Jesus is touched, and when he touches? What did the woman and Jairus each do that Haggai's people had not done for eighteen years?

8. Read Revelation 3:19–20: discipline, repent, open the door. On Sunday, twenty-five people were baptized. What would opening the door look like for you this week? If you have never been baptized, what would it take for you to take that step?

handiwork prayer

Scripture says about us, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10). As a group, pick a common time tomorrow (could be 9:00AM or 4:00PM, etc.), and share with the group what you will normally be doing at that time. For some it may be that you're dropping off or picking up a child from school; to another perhaps beginning or ending work; or to another, having breakfast with a friend or thinking about what to prepare for dinner with the family. Ponder the "good works" God has in store for you during that time tomorrow. Share your thoughts in the form of a prayer request about how you'd like God to use you to accomplish something good. Then take time to pray for one another.

notes on the text

1. "Yet you did not turn to me" (v. 17). The Hebrew here is very difficult; read literally, it says something like "there was no you toward me." The NIV supplies "turn" from the parallel in Amos 4:9. The sense is clear: God kept striking, and no one came. Richard Taylor calls it his "loving but relentless discipline."
2. "Is there yet any seed left in the barn?" (v. 19). The sowing is finished; nothing is left in storage (Boda). Seed left in the barn yields nothing, but sown seed has "the potential for yield" (Jacobs; cf. John 12:24).
3. From this day on I will bless you" (v. 19). The verb is אֲבָרֵךְ (ʾăbārēk). It is the first time Haggai uses the word "bless" (Boda), and it echoes God's first promise to Abraham: "I will bless you" (Genesis 12:2). The curse is now in the past tense, and the blessing is promised before anything has grown.

Background

This is the second half of the word Haggai brought on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, 18 December 520 BC: the same day as last week's passage, exactly three months after the people began to work (1:14–15), and the day the temple's foundation was laid (2:18). For eighteen years, since Cyrus's decree in 538 BC, the house had lain in ruins.

By mid-December the harvest was over and the sowing finished. The vine, fig, pomegranate and olive were the crops of the promised land (Deuteronomy 8:8). "Blight and mildew" echo the covenant warnings of Deuteronomy 28:22 and Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 8:37). Amos preached his refrain to the northern kingdom about two hundred years earlier.