

As the floodwaters subsided in Houston, I came upon this brief interview with a man and his son who had lost everything. Check this out... Video of Harvey victim – “God is good.”

When the storms come, and they will, our faith is put to the test. As the floodwaters rise, so do our prayers. “Help us God. Deliver us God. Save us from these horrible circumstances.” But the reality of our faith is displayed not so much in what we do during the flood but what we do after it. Everyone cries out to God in their distress. It is a lot less common to hear people cry out to God when crisis is over.

In times of calamity people look to God, churches fill up, people pray. But once the crisis is over, what then? Can you think of a Sunday, in the past 20 years, when churches experienced record crowds?” September 16, 2001. The Sunday after 9/11 nearly 50% of Americans were in church or synagogue. Within a month, the number of people in worship was back to pre-9/11 numbers. Why is that? The simple answer is that we suffer from misplaced priorities. The fuller answer is contained within the pages of a little book called Haggai.

The Book of Haggai is the second shortest book in the Old Testament. Haggai was a prophet sent by God with a message to the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. In 586 B.C., when the people of God were taken by force and enslaved by the Babylonians, it was a time of sorrow as Ps. 137:1-6 recounts...

For seventy years God’s displaced people longed to return to the Promised Land. In 536 B.C., they were set free and began to return with great hope. But a not-so-funny thing happened once they got there. They forgot what they were called to do with their freedom. So, they sat. For 16 years they rebuilt their homes and their lives while the temple of God, the very center of Jewish worship, remained in ruins. The Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple 70 years earlier. The first returnees started to clear away the debris and lay the foundation for a second temple. As the years passed, slowly but surely, their priorities shifted. They built homes, opened stores, planted crops. Life returned to normal with one notable exception, there was no worship. Of course, there was no temple to facilitate worship but it appears that many of these people had lost their appetite for worship. When that happens, it is easy to rationalize away the priority of worship. I hear it all the time. So do you. “Well, you don’t have to go to church (temple) to be a Christian (Jew).”

Haggai appears on the scene with one prevailing message: It’s time to put first things first. It’s time to finish rebuilding the Temple, the heart and soul of Jewish worship. The Jews didn’t believe that God lived in the Temple, God is too big to be contained in a building. But the Temple was the place where God had made His presence known. Free from captivity, God’s people were neglecting the worship of God. And here is the irony – their careless worship was the very cause of their exile to begin with. Israel’s complacency was a testimony to their misplaced priorities. They had exchanged the glory of God for their own glory.

Let’s go back a couple of thousand years and see what happens when we take our eyes off God and how we can recover from a mad case of misplaced priorities. If you are suffering from a similar disorder, if you feel like your life is out of sync with God, let me suggest a couple of things you can do to get back on track.

**I. Learn to distinguish between the urgent and the important.** We are all busy people. Our calendars are full. There are urgent matters that require our attention. But urgent is not the same as important. As Jesus said to a busy woman named Martha, only one thing is important. That one thing is found here in the first eight verses of Haggai...1:1-8.

There is no higher priority than the glory of God. God created us for His glory. “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory.” (Is. 43:6-7). A life that is not lived for the glory of God is a wasted life. God created us to glorify Him not to glorify ourselves. That’s a tough sell in our culture. In our world, to love someone is to make much of them, to build up their self-esteem, to help them feel good about themselves. But that definition is a total distortion of the message in the Bible that love is doing what is in the best interests of another. Making myself the object of my highest affections is not only unbiblical, it is a deadly distraction.

“We were made to see and savor God – and savoring Him, to be supremely satisfied, and thus spread in all the world the worth of His presence. Not to show people the all-satisfying God is not to love them. To make them feel good about themselves when they were made to feel good about seeing God is like taking someone to the Alps and locking them in a room full of mirrors.” Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, p. 33

When they returned from exile, God’s people got busy. But they were busy with the wrong things. They lost sight of their true purpose. If the life you are living is crazier than you want, it may be because you have less of Jesus than you need. The only remedy is worship.

**II. Declare war on procrastination.** Haggai confronted excuses for the Temple lying in ruins...v. 2. They intended to build God's house, but just hadn't got around to it yet. If you were to ask them about it, they would probably say, "I'm all for building the Temple but God. I know it's important. But I think God wants us to take care of our own families first. Times are tough. Jobs are scarce. We need to pray about it some more. We will eventually build it, but not now." They made excuses.

Benjamin Franklin wrote, "I never knew a man who was good at making excuses who was good at anything else." It is easy to make excuses when you don't want to obey God. We can always find excuses for not doing what God wants us to do: The time is not right. I've got family responsibilities. My kids need me now. When things settle down at work, then I can do something. “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come.’” They were mastering the art of procrastination. Of course it wasn’t THEIR homes that were "under construction." There were no weeds growing around THEIR unfinished foundations. Their homes were nice. They called in Chip and Joanna to fix up their homes. In v. 4 where it says “paneled houses,” the Hebrew word there is “shiplap.” (Not true) Their fixer uppers were all fixed up while the Temple remained a pile of rubble.

Haggai said, “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?” If he were here today I wonder what he would say to us? “Is it time for you to accumulate wealth while your church is struggling to pay the bills? Is it time for you to attend

football games and cruise shopping malls when you say you don't have the time to meet with God's people? Is it time for you to seek your own glory while the glory of God is disregarded?"

One of the tell-tale signs of misplaced priorities is the revenge of offended absolutes. When we stray from God's priorities we invite His divine discipline...vv. 6, 9-11.

You got the raise but you're still in debt.  
You are working harder than ever but have nothing to show for it.  
You eat at nice restaurants but it does not satisfy the hunger in your soul.  
You drink your fill but you are still thirsty.

Ask God, "Are you trying to get my attention?" It is not uncommon for someone to ask for prayer because everything seems to be falling apart in their life. What is uncommon is for the same people to make the connection between the decisions that they have made and the outcomes. When things aren't going your way, it's possible God is trying to get your attention.

**3. Make time to think.** Vv. 5, 7. "Consider your ways" (ESV), "Look at what is happening to you" (NLT), "Pay close attention to these things" (NET), "Think about what you have done" (NCV). Richard Swenson wrote a book called *Margin*. He says, "Margin is the space between our load and our limits." Planning for margin means planning for the unplannable. It means we know our limits and we plan for less than that. Businesses are now pursuing what is called "white space." The web site, [whitespaceatwork.com](http://whitespaceatwork.com) says, "WhiteSpace is a strategic pause taken between activities. It can be used in tiny sips as small as two seconds or in longer stretches. These thoughtful pauses laced through the busyness of the workday are the oxygen that allows everything else to catch fire."

When was the last time you just made time to think, to sort out your priorities, and to identify your posteriorities? That is Peter Drucker's word for the things that should be at the end of our "to do" list, things we decide NOT to do for the sake of the things we must do. The people on this planet who end up doing nothing are those who never realized that they could not do everything.

**4. Recalibrate your life.** The response of God's people is encouraging. They humbled themselves, feared the Lord and obeyed Him...v. 12. This is the response God is looking for. This is what I call "heartitude." These people didn't lack knowledge. They didn't lack a rich religious heritage. They didn't lack fortitude. What they lacked was HEARTITUDE, the heart attitude that values the glory of God above all else. Heartitude is what God values most. God's primary concern was not the physical Temple but a Temple made without hands, a Temple made up of "living stones," a Temple composed of people from every tribe and nation and tongue in which God's glory dwells. Here is how Isaiah describes what God values.

"Thus says the Lord: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.'" Is. 66:1-2

God delights in using those with heartitude. “For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.” 2 Chron. 16:9. Because of their obedience, God assured them of His presence ...vv. 13-15.

The temple of the OT existed for the glory of God just as the church today exists for the glory of God. God didn't set us free so we could be as comfortable as possible for as long as possible. God didn't set us free to be made much of. He set us free to make much of Him. We have no choice about the coming of the storms in our lives. We do have a choice about how we live between storms. When the storm subsides and the waters recede, let's seek the glory of God.

As we prepare for communion I want to invite you to “consider your ways.” The call to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” is a calling that runs the risk of being eclipsed by self-serving interests. Let's lay aside every quest for personal advantage that detracts from the greater cause of the kingdom of God in our midst. All our work should have as its end goal the glory of God. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Cor. 10:31