

When God Gets Our Attention

Haggai 1:5-11

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Being empty nesters has certainly been an adjustment. While I love having more time with Beth, sometimes I walk around the house calling out the names of our daughters...Emily, Lydia, Becca, Megan...but they don't answer. I find myself getting nostalgic and remembering different things that happened when they were younger.

Here's a vivid memory. One afternoon many years ago I picked up our daughter Megan after school. I arrived a bit early and was chatting with some other parents when all of a sudden I heard a mom scream and point to the floor. I looked and saw a huge black spider making its way across the floor. A young girl moved forward to pick it up. Someone else wondered if it was one of those fake ones. I went into action and simply stomped on it. When I lifted up my shoe, I saw a whole bunch of baby spiders scurrying across the floor. I smashed them as well while the screaming mom jumped up on a chair.

As you can imagine, this really got everyone's attention. A few students ran to tell their classmates. When the bell rang and the kids poured out of their classrooms, many already knew what had taken place. I felt like a superhero! It didn't take long for the story to grow, along with the size of the spider.

This really shook up the students...and especially the mom on the chair! This incident certainly got our attention...and now, it's gotten yours!

Have you ever been through an experience that God used to arrest your attention? It might not be a spider but maybe it's been stress or the loss of someone you love, or a sin exposed in your life, or getting laid off from a job, or a relational rupture, or money worries, or family friction or maybe it's a general sense of frustration or even futility. We're going to learn today that *dissatisfaction is designed to lead us to find satisfaction in God alone.*

Pastor Dan did a great job last weekend from Daniel 3 reminding us that *when you can't go around it, God will get you through it.* Sometimes we suffer when we're doing what's right. We're called to trust God through the circumstances, no matter what happens.

Today we're going to look at the other side of this same coin. Sometimes we suffer *because* we're doing something wrong. God may allow *bad things* to happen so that we turn from *bad things*. Or to say it another way, *God loves you too much to let you keep going the wrong way.*

We learned two weeks ago from the opening verses of Haggai that if you're spiritually stuck or drifting due to disobedience, it's time to settle this truth: *God's purposes must have priority over our pursuits.* We were challenged to...

- **Put God in His proper place**
- **Proceed without procrastination**
- **Prioritize God over your pleasures**

Let's put our text in historical context again. Because of their deliberate disobedience, the Babylonians destroyed Judah and God's people were captured and brought to Babylon to live. Many of God's prophets predicted this captivity would last for 70 years after which God's people would be allowed to go back home.

2 Chronicles 36:22-23 fills in some detail: "*Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'*"

After this decree 50,000 Jews returned to Judah, rebuilt the altar and began offering sacrifices. Two years later they finished the foundation of the Temple. It's difficult for us to recognize how important the temple was so keep this in mind: *The temple is where heaven and humanity met.* But then they stopped working and honed in on their own homes for 16 years. Haggai comes on the scene to tell them to put God at the center of their lives and to get back to work. But first God has to get them to jump up on their chairs.

Today we're going to unpack Haggai 1:5-11: "*Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put*

them into a bag with holes. ⁷ ‘*Thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways.*
⁸ *Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD.* ⁹ *You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house.* ¹⁰ *Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce.* ¹¹ *And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors.’”*

God is calling us to:

- **Pause and Ponder**
- **Look and Learn**
- **Go and Get**

Let's see what God has for us.

1. Pause and Ponder. In verse 5, God again refers to himself as *Jehovah Sabaoth* in order to get their perspective back to where it should be: “*Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts ...*” Simply put, they had lost their view of God as big and mighty. They, and us, need to recapture how mighty and majestic He really is because when our understanding of God’s immensity slips, we allow other things to overshadow Him. Instead of praising Him, they were living for their own pleasure. That reminds me of a book by J. B. Philips called, “*Your God is too Small.*” I’ve been meditating on a phrase from a sermon by Kevin DeYoung: “*We become what we behold. We think too highly of ourselves and too lightly of God.*”

After reminding them of His immutable immensity, God says in the second half of verse 5: “**Consider your ways...**” This is the major message of the book and is unique to Haggai, occurring five times in two chapters: in 1:5, in 1:7, in 2:15 and twice in 2:18. Idiomatically it refers to, “*laying your heart on the road.*” Literally it means to “*bring your mind to bear upon your ways.*” It also has the idea of inspecting, ruminating and reflecting. To use more popular language, we’re to think about *why* things stink in our lives. The New Living Translation puts it like this: “*Look at what’s happening to you!*”

That’s not easy to do, is it? This is especially the case when we’re surrounded with mindless pursuits and shallow thinking. Have you ever thought about what the word “amusement” means? To “muse” means to think and when the letter “a” is

put in front it means to “not think.” According to Merriam-Webster, it once meant, “*to divert the attention of; so as to deceive.*” That reminds me of a book I read some time ago called, “*Amusing Ourselves to Death.*”

Youth Hope is one of our Go Team partners. In their recent newsletter, I came across some really sad stats.

- The average screen time for kids is 6.5 hours a day
- Children play outside an average of just 4 minutes a day
- 85% of Youth Hope kids do not have a biological father present

The good news is that for only \$200 a child can go to Camp Summit for a week this summer! Here’s one more stat – 83% of Christians accept Christ between the ages of 4 and 14!

Related to this, a study just came out that reports Generation Z (those born between 1998 and 2010) has become disenchanted with electronics and social media.

Here’s one line that jumped out at me: “*Teens and tweens today have unprecedented access to technology, and yet many report they’ve never been so bored.*”

Have you become so bored you’ve stopped bringing your mind to bear on things? Let’s be honest. Most of us are experts in considering the ways of others but not so much in considering our own ways. It’s easy to slam someone else while excusing ourselves. But God says: “**Consider your ways.**” He’s calling each of us to engage our minds and do a serious inventory, much like we’re instructed to do before communion in 1 Corinthians 11:28: “**Let a person examine himself, then.**” If we don’t, we’ll default to living for ourselves and not for the Almighty.

In his book called, “The Christian Atheist,” Craig Groeschel suggests that many Christians believe in God but live as if He doesn’t exist. Socrates was right when he said, “*The unexamined life is not worth living.*”

Let’s pause and ponder right now as we soak up some other Scriptures.

- Lamentations 3:40: “**Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the Lord.**”
- 2 Corinthians 13:5: “**Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves...**”

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After pausing and pondering, God calls His people to go deeper by looking at what's been happening and then learning from it.

2. Look and Learn. Verse 6 shows what happens when we don't put God first. It's hard to see in English but in Hebrew these phrases come out in staccato bursts: **"You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes."** God hit their agriculture and their economy hard. As the saying goes, "*My take-home pay will not take me home.*" The message is clear – we will never find satisfaction until we find our satisfaction in Him. There was a lot of action but they could get no satisfaction (no, I'm not going to sing that).

The phrase "**you never have enough**," means that they never experienced abundance or satisfaction. In addition, to "**never have your fill**" refers to always being thirsty, no matter how inebriated you might get. They put on layers of clothing but "**no one is warm.**" God is saying something like this: "*However much you have is never going to be enough; whatever you do turns to dust; however hard you try you are not satisfied; whatever work you do tastes like ashes in your mouths.*" Solomon says it like this in Ecclesiastes 1:2, 8: "**Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity...All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.**"

God was assigning their affliction in order to get their attention. This frustration was seen in the three basic needs of life – food, water, and clothing. And this led to futility because whatever they thought they had disappeared like money put into pockets with holes in them. It was like a double curse. They brought little home and then it leaked out of their wallets.

Friend, if God is not at the center of your life, even if you get what you think you need it won't be enough. Micah 6:14 says: "**You shall eat, but not be satisfied, and there shall be hunger within you.**"

You've probably heard this expression before: "*The hurrier I go, the behinder I get.*" God not only understood their circumstances; He was the One who arranged them. Sometimes God gives us what we crave so that we'll experience some

consequences, with the ultimate goal being that we turn back to Him. Psalm 106:15 says: “***He gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them.***”

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Let me say it as clearly as I can: *If we put our purposes above God’s priorities, we will never get what we’re after.* Here’s a news flash: *Only God can satisfy your soul.* Until you worship the Lord as number one, life won’t work. The more we marginalize Him, the more we live without margin.

This is expanded in verse 9: “***You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house.***” The tense of the phrase, “***looked for much,***” indicates that they were continually looking for a lot. The word “***behold***” has the idea of certainty and could be translated, “*look now.*”

Don’t miss who is behind their difficulties. It’s not Satan or a spouse or a neighbor or a co-worker or a classmate. God says, “***What you brought home, I blew away.***” This is literally translated, “*I did blow away.*” To be “***blown away***” has the idea of boiling or fanning a fire and is vividly pictured in 2 Samuel 22:16: “***...At the rebuke of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils.***”

God links their situation directly to their sins when He says emphatically, “***Because of my house...***” The word “***ruins***” refers to dry and desolate. To “***busy themselves***” means they were “*running all the while each to his own house.*” It has the idea of excitement, intensity and urgency and was used of horses running at full gallop. They loved being busy with their own business so much so that they stopped doing God’s business. As one of Beth’s sisters often says, “*People do what they want to do.*” Philippians 2:21: “***For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.***”

They were absorbed in their own pursuits. I find it fascinating that this is how Jesus describes the pursuit of pagans in Matthew 6:31-32: “***Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek [run after] after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.***”

Do you feel like all you're doing is running around from thing to thing? Have you ever noticed how many times people answer the question, "*How are you?*" with this phrase, "*I'm busy.*" It's like we need to validate our lives by letting people know how busy we are. When people tell me why they haven't been to church for a while, the number one answer I hear is, "*We've just been so busy.*" Listen. Our busyness can keep us from God's business. Let me say it strongly: *If you're too busy to regularly gather with God's people on Saturday nights or Sunday mornings, you're too busy.*

Haggai uses couplets and triplets to express the totality of the drought in verses 10-11: "***Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands.***" God hits their three main crops in the two main growing seasons, out in the fields and up on the mountains – grain, grapes and oil. He also afflicts the animals and the labor of their hands. In addition, this drought encompasses all of creation, from "***the heavens***" to "***the earth.***"

Listen. God is not doing this because He *hates* them; He's doing it because He *loves* them and longs for them to come back to their spiritual senses.

Let me give an important disclaimer. It doesn't necessarily mean that because you are having problems that God is punishing you. There's often not a direct correlation between your suffering and your sin. Just ask Job or Jeremiah.

Having said that, because God loves us so much that when He sees us drifting His aim in our adversity is to get our attention. If we end up broken and on our knees, or standing on a chair, that's a good thing! One commentator writes this:

"Experiences of hardship should always become opportunities for spiritual reflection." Here's how I work it all out. When I go through something challenging or difficult, I try to ask these kinds of questions: "*God, what are you trying to teach me? Is there a sin I need to confess? What do you want me to change in my life?*" Once I do an inventory, I move on because it can become unproductive to think God is punishing me through every problem I have.

Charles Spurgeon has written, "*God doesn't allow his children to sin successfully.*" That's why sin often gets exposed. God cares too much to let you meander through life, pursuing only your own pleasure. As a result, God blew it all away. There's an interesting play on words in the Hebrew. The word "***ruins***"

in verse 9 is *harev* and the word for “***drought***” in verse 11 is *horev*. Drought came because of disobedience. God’s house was in ruins while each was “***busy with his own house.***”

C.S. Lewis once said, “*God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*” He blows stuff away and calls for a drought *so that* we will return to Him. If it seems like what you’ve been chasing has just vaporized before your eyes, if you make money only to find it flowing through holes in your pockets, if you feel like you never have enough, the Lord Almighty may be knocking out the props in your life to get your attention.

When someone is straying and sinning and doesn’t appear like they’re interested in the things of God anymore, I often pray a prayer like this: “*God make them miserable in their sin. Do whatever you need to do to bring them back to you. Like the prodigal son, help them see the slop their sin has caused them. Make them restless and dissatisfied until they find their satisfaction in you alone.*”

There are many people who don’t yet know Christ who are searching for satisfaction in all the wrong places. We’ve included a pamphlet in your bulletin today called, [Soul Satisfaction](#). Would you look for someone to give it to this week? *Dissatisfaction is designed to lead us to find satisfaction in God alone.*

3. Go and Get. It’s not enough to just pause and ponder or even to look and learn. God also wants us to go and get. We see this in verse 8: “***Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the LORD.***” The command to “*go up*” refers to upward motion. It’s time to amend what is amiss. As far as I can tell, this is the only command in the entire book. It’s actually threefold – go, bring, and build. It’s not enough to just say we love God; we must live out our love. Words are good, but actions are better. God wants us to work. The logs won’t come rolling down the mountain on their own. They had to go up and then bring down and then get to work building.

Don’t miss that God had already provided the resources they needed; they just needed to go and get them. That’s encouraging to me as we consider our facility renovation and expansion project. God will provide the resources as we give what He has already given to us.

When someone tells me that they want things to change, I often ask them how badly they want to get better. If we sort of, kind of...want to get back to where we need to be spiritually, it probably won't happen. We have to go after God if we want to change because our default setting is selfishness and we're all prone to procrastination. We always head south if we stay passive. Sometimes we need to go and get resources, seek out help, sign up for counseling, and pursue accountability. If we're serious about rebuilding our relationships or finding fulfillment or aligning ourselves with God's purposes, we're going to have to *go and get*.

We do this not just so we're satisfied but ultimately so that God is glorified. We don't make changes just to get out of our predicament but to please God because when He is glorified, we will be satisfied as well. One author puts it like this: "*God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.*"

God finds great pleasure when we give Him His rightful place. He is honored when we honor Him as 1 Samuel 2:30 says, "***For those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.***" He is worshipped when we consider Him to be weighty.

I've been pondering something David Platt said at the conference: "*People who worship God above them will work for justice in those around them.*" We must strive for justice in racial matters, justice for the preborn in the womb, justice for the widow and orphan and refugee, justice for those who are sexually trafficked, and justice for those persecuted for their faith, like Pastor Andrew Brunson who is in prison in Turkey awaiting the continuation of his trial on May 7. Some of us shy away from standing against injustice but here's what God says in Micah 6:8: "***He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?***"

Our worship must lead to work. Our faith must be lived out through our feet. What we proclaim with our lips must be fleshed out in our lives. If we're saved, we will serve. Love for God must lead to love for neighbor. The Christian life can be summed up in this line from the hymn, "*Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*"

It may seem that we talk too much about our 4Gs but I don't think that's possible. If we don't keep *gathering* in front of us, we'll drift into isolation. If we're not challenged to *grow* by joining a Growth Group and practicing the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer and memorization, we'll stall out spiritually. If

we don't elevate the importance of *giving*, we won't grow in generosity and will spend everything we have on ourselves. And if we don't *go* with the gospel, we'll just focus on us four and no more.

BTW, related to our Go value, Pastor Dan has been building some bridges with Rock Island Academy in west Rock Island. He recently heard that the students were having a week of testing and needed some water bottles. Pastor Dan went out and purchased over a thousand bottles of water from our Missions budget and delivered them. We received a package this week filled with thank you notes. Here are some of them.

Let's refuse to displease or disgrace God. *His name and His fame should be what we proclaim.* We're not in the practice of reciting creeds or confessions but I love the profound simplicity of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "*Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*"

Too many of us just give God part of our life, like a Village Inn pie that is cut up into different slices – my social slice, my job slice, my family slice, my hobby slice, my school slice, my retirement slice, my sports slice...oh, and my spiritual slice. God doesn't want a slice of your life; He deserves and demands the whole pie. I don't know what's worse – deliberately disobeying God or not giving Him first place in my life. In Isaiah 48:11, God says, "***My glory I will not give to another.***"

Let's pick up what comes right after Jesus describes how the pagans run after food, drink and clothes in Matthew 6:33: "***But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.***" Things work when God is worshipped. *Our needs are met when we recognize that God is all we need.*

As I reflected on this, I wrote down four applications.

1. The more you focus on your own happiness the unhappier you will become. If you're not satisfied in God alone you won't be satisfied with anything else.

2. Sin will take you farther than you were planning to go, keep you longer than you were planning to stay and cost you more than you were planning to pay. Listen. God will not bless if you are unwilling to confess. The Christ follower is called to make constant corrections and to practice continuous confession.

3. Pleasing God is the only pursuit that will give you ultimate pleasure. You can put forth all the effort you can muster, but if you are not faithfully following Christ, you will fall on your face. Stuff won't satisfy. Friends won't fulfill you. The pursuit of pleasure won't please you.

4. When we prioritize God in our giving, He promises to bless us. Malachi 3:8-10: “*Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*”

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Pause and Ponder.

Look and Learn.

Go and Get.

Has God got your attention? Is there an area of neglect you need to address? Is there a sin to confess? Is there something God is calling you to do that you've been delaying to obey Him in? Delayed obedience is disobedience.

Oh, that we would be like the psalmist when he wrote in Psalm 119:59-60: “*When I think on my ways, I turn my feet to your testimonies; I hasten and do not delay to keep your commandments.*”

Closing Song: “I Will Follow”