

Putting First Things First

Haggai 1:12-15

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I'm not in the practice of reading GQ, which comes as no surprise to many of you. But I did read an article in the most recent issue called, "*21 Books You Don't Have to Read Before You Die.*" Sadly, the Bible is ranked #12.

"...It is certainly not the finest thing that man has ever produced. It is repetitive, self-contradictory, sententious [I had to look that word up. It means, "abounding in excessive moralizing."], foolish, and even at times ill-intentioned."

I can't say it any better than Franklin Graham: "*I guess they can't explain why the Bible is the best-selling and most widely distributed book in the world. Recent estimates put the number that have been distributed since 1815 at more than 5 BILLION copies—and over 100 million are printed every year! The Holy Bible is God-breathed, it is living and active, and it is sharper than a double-edged sword. There's nothing more powerful, and there's nothing more needed by mankind than the Word of God. Maybe the GQ editors need to read it, again. The subject of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is Jesus Christ. And one day soon, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.*"

There is however, a sentence in the GQ article that is true: "*The Holy Bible is rated very highly by all the people who supposedly live by it but who in actuality have not read it.*" According to new research from *Lifeway*, a third of Americans never pick up a Bible on their own. The title of one of their blog posts is telling: "*Americans are fond of the Bible [but] don't actually read it.*" For those who have read the Bible, less than a quarter have a systematic plan for reading the Scriptures every day.

I love that Edgewood is a Bible-preaching, Bible-teaching and Bible-reading church! I was so encouraged to see the results of a Facebook poll put together by our newest team member, Vikki Huisman, who is serving as our communications director. Over 80% of respondents use a daily Bible reading plan! There's a new one in your bulletin today for the month of May called, "Growing in Wisdom Through the Proverbs." Special thanks to Pastor Tim and to Marie Guyton for

making this happen each month. We've said this before but it bears repeating - *if you're not growing in the Scriptures, you won't grow spiritually.*

Last week we discovered that *dissatisfaction is designed to lead us to find satisfaction in God alone.*

Today we're going to see in Haggai 1:12-15 that *it's never too late to do what's right as long as we keep the main thing the main thing: "Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD. ¹³ Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD."¹⁴ And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, ¹⁵ on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king."*

Their Response

One of my favorite things about Edgewood is how you respond to the preaching of God's Word! I think Haggai would have said the same thing about his congregation.

1. They hear and obey. In 1:8, God is very specific about what He wants them to do: *"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."* God takes great pleasure when we treasure Him and obey what He says. Listen to how verse 12 begins: *"Then..."* As a result of what they heard, they heeded God's call: *"Then Zerubbabel...Joshua...and all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God..."* This is pretty amazing because most of the time people did not listen to the prophets. Just ask Jeremiah.

We've taught our girls this truth: *Delayed obedience is still disobedience.* If you're drifting and want to get back, then practice immediate obedience. Good intentions don't matter; only obedience does. Is there something you have not done that you know God wants you to do? 1 Samuel 15:22 reminds us that even religious ritual is not as important as obedience: *"To obey is better than sacrifice."*

Or are you doing something that you shouldn't be doing? Sometimes God disciplines his people in order to get them back on mission. Psalm 119:67: ***"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word."***

Someone put it like this: *"We have only one day to follow God and it's not yesterday because that day is gone. It's not tomorrow, because we can't be certain that it will come. All we have is today."* As Hebrews 3:7-8 says: ***"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..."***

Would you notice in verse 12 that they refer to the Lord as ***"their"*** God? In verse 2, God calls them ***"these people"*** but now they are referred to as the ***"remnant"*** in verse 12 and in verse 14. The word ***"remnant"*** refers to the *"rest, residue, remainder or survivor."* God always has a remnant even if it's a small group. He is committed to His people, even if they seem insignificant in the eyes of others. Genesis 45:7 tells us Joseph knew why he was in Egypt: ***"And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors."***

Sometimes when we stray and we're far away, we think that we have to make our way back by performing or earning our acceptance. Listen. You don't have to prove yourself trustworthy, just trust in His trustworthiness. If you feel a mile away from God, the way to get back is to simply take a step and you're back! They had drifted and disobeyed for 16 years but all they needed to do was repent and their relationship with God was immediately restored.

When the prodigal son realized that his sin had sent him to the slop that the pigs were living in, he made a turn and headed home. He developed a speech filled with promises of performance. What he didn't know was that the Father was waiting for him and when he saw his son, he came running to him, embraced him and welcomed him home. Friend, the father is waiting for you with open arms. I love the promise found in Joel 2:25: ***"I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten."***

It's never too late to do what's right as long as we keep the main thing the main thing.

2. They fear and don't delay. Check out the last phrase in verse 12: ***"...And the people feared the Lord."*** While the word "fear" means, *"to revere"* it also refers to being frightened. Literally it means, *"to fear in the presence of."* The idea is to

have such a holy sense of awe in the presence of the Almighty that we are led to reverential trust. Consider these verses:

- Psalm 2:11: “*Serve the Lord with **fear**, and rejoice with **trembling**.*”
- Proverbs 1:7: “*The **fear** of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*”
- Ecclesiastes 12:13: “*The end of the matter; all has been heard. **Fear** God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*”
- Hebrews 12:28-29: “*...Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with **reverence and awe**, for our God is a consuming fire.*”

A recent study by the Barna Group found that almost 60 percent of Christians ages 15 to 29 have distanced themselves from active involvement in church. That stat is not new to me but the reasons why this is happening have now been spelled out. David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, says that young people find churches too shallow: “[They] tell us that...Christianity has become so hip, so watered-down, so about entertainment – and they’re looking for something of more substance.”

When churches preach the Word of the Lord robustly and without compromise, people are drawn to the Lord of the Word. That’s how it’s always been according to Acts 9:31: “*So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And **walking in the fear of the Lord** and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.*”

I like what Matthew Henry once said: “*A holy fear of God will have a great influence upon our obedience to Him...if we fear Him not, we shall serve Him not.*” Note the order here. When we hear and obey and fear and not delay, *then* God goes to work.

We could put it like this: *It’s not your way, it’s not my way...it’s YAHWEH!*

If you find yourself struggling to revere God and your prayers have become rote and routine, let me suggest a practical way to grow in the fear of God. This past Wednesday night our Growth Group (you’re in a group, right?) simply used each letter of the alphabet that represents attributes or characteristics of God. When we thought of something we said it out loud. For example, for “A” we said, *awesome, Almighty, absolute*. For “B” we came up with words like, *beautiful, big, blessing*. Let’s try it. What comes to your mind for the letter “C”?

After the people responded, God gave them some reassurance. When they hear and fear, God shows that He is near. When we do things God's way, He makes a way for us to work.

God's Reassurance

1. His presence is with them. Look at 1:13: *“Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord spoke to the people with the Lord’s message...”* Here we see again the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Let’s go back to what the GQ article said about the Bible, *“It is certainly not the finest thing that man has ever produced...”* The Bible never claims to be a book written by man. The Bible is the *“Lord’s message”* spoken by *“the messenger of the Lord.”* According to verse 12, *“God had sent”* Haggai the messenger with this message for his people. The word of God comes through human instruments as 2 Peter 1:21 says, *“they spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*

Here’s the message God communicates through His messenger Haggai: *“I am with you, declares the Lord.”* This is emphatic in the original. The God of the angel armies promises to be with us when we hear Him and fear Him. Here are some other passages that affirm this truth

- Exodus 3:12: *“But I will be with you.”*
- Isaiah 41:10: *“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*
- Matthew 28:20: *“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*
- Romans 8:31: *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

God is not only with them; He also wakes them up so they can get to work.

2. His power awakens them. We see this in 1:14: *“So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel...and the spirit of Joshua...and the spirit of all the remnant of the people.”* They moved from apathy to an awakening. The word *“stirring”* means to *“wake up a sleepy person so they’re alert and ready for action.”* It also has the idea of *“rousing, motivating and agitating”* and implies causation: *“So the Lord caused their spirit to be awakened.”*

There are many places in the Bible where we are told to rise from spiritual sleep like in Romans 13:11: *“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come*

for you to wake from sleep.” I’m reminded of a vintage Keith Green song called “Asleep in the Light.”

“You close your eyes and pretend the job’s done. The world is sleeping in the dark that the church just can’t fight, ‘cause it’s asleep in the light. How can you be so dead when you’ve been so well fed? Jesus rose from the grave and you, you can’t even get out of bed!”

Have you ever been stirred by the Spirit? According to 2 Chronicles 36:22, God **“stirred up the spirit of Cyrus”** to send the people back to Jerusalem. In Ezra 1:5, we read, **“Then rose up the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem.”** After sliding into spiritual sleepiness for 16 years, God is stirring His people to get back to work.

It’s never too late to do what’s right as long as we keep the main thing the main thing.

Another prophet reminds us that God’s purposes must be done in God’s power. Turn over one book to Zechariah 4:6: **“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”**

Notice how Philippians 2:13 pulls together our role and God’s role: **“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”** We’re to work out what He has worked in. We could say it like this: *Where God guides, He provides.* God’s purposes ultimately depend on God’s power. He gives the orders. He gives the energy. And He works out His will and His ways for His pleasure and glory.

I’ve been praying that God would stir us to accomplish His purposes in our community; in the counties we live in, in our country and on the continents. I’m looking forward to gathering with other believers this Thursday at noon at the Rock Island Courthouse for the National Day of Prayer. Gatherings for prayer will be taking place in 7 other locations in the Quad Cities area – Bettendorf, Coal Valley, Colona, Davenport, East Moline, Milan and Moline. There’s a sheet on the resource table with times and locations.

I want to pray a portion of the prayer that will be prayed all over the country on Thursday.

Oh God, we are burdened for our nation...we turn from the sins that we have committed against your Word and your Name. We turn away from our contentious words and ways toward one another that has led us to division and polarization. We turn away from our disrespect and lack of dignity toward each other, and we turn away from our continual devaluation of all human life from the womb until death in this world. We also turn away from and refuse to participate in skepticism, criticism, and cynicism in our nation. We turn away from anything that divides us, and we run toward the gospel of Jesus Christ that is the only thing that has the power to unite us together.

We pray for Bible-preaching churches in America to unify in Jesus Christ and we pray for our country passionately, perpetually, privately, and publicly.

We pray for your power to unify families, workplaces, communities, and cities in America. By Your Spirit, lead us to forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, and unity.

We pray for people of all ethnicities and races in America to come together as one...give us the courage to stand against all racial and ethnic division.

Oh Lord, wake up Your church spiritually and convict Your people to agree clearly, unite visibly, and pray extraordinarily until the next Great Spiritual Awakening occurs in our generation.

In the mighty and majestic name of Jesus Christ who is the Only Savior and the Only Hope in this world, we pray. Amen.

The Result

Knowing that God is with us gives us great comfort. Then His power awakens us so we can get to work serving. Haggai 1:14 tells us that they **“came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.”** Let’s think about what they **“came”** to. They came to the place of previous destruction, where the ruins were a reminder of what their enemy had done and where they had previously failed. It was no doubt a place of great anxiety, much like “ground zero” is for Americans in the aftermath of 9/11.

That’s why they needed a fresh stirring from the Lord. The word **“work”** has the idea of **“completing, accomplishing and finishing.”** God’s workers went from

being delayed to being disciplined to being deployed. God's encouragement led to their empowerment.

There are two extremes to avoid.

- One is to experience a stirring and not do anything about it.
- The other is to serve in your own strength without any stirring from the Spirit.

Listen. The stirring of the Spirit must always lead to serving in the Spirit. God's work depends on God's Spirit. Church, it's not enough to just be stirred emotionally; we must be stirred to action. The Holy Spirit is stirring...now let's get to work and serve like never before!

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus called his disciples to live on mission: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing [lots of baptisms this weekend] them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*** While the disciples wanted more information about end times, Jesus tells them to be His witnesses in Acts 1:8. Note that they were to wait to witness until the Holy Spirit stirred them: ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*** A promise of power and a mandate for mission is given, but there is no stirring of the spirit in Acts 1.

This happens in Acts 2 at Pentecost where we read in verse 2: ***“And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.”*** This becomes clearer in verse 17, when Peter quotes from the prophet Joel in his sermon: ***“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.”***

The Spirit of God did not merely “stir up” their spirits but filled them and empowered them and gave them the words to say. And not only that, but now the Holy Spirit of God dwells not in a building, but in believers!

1. The church body is God's temple now. 1 Corinthians 3:16 – *“Do you not know that you [plural] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?”*

2. The Christian's body is God's temple now. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you*

have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

We're to ask the Spirit to stir us and we're also called to awaken each other according to Hebrews 10:24: “*And let us consider how to **stir up** one another to love and good works.*” We must hear *and* fear *and* then get ourselves in gear! We can do that because He is with us and within us and He has awakened us.

When the remnant repented and rededicated themselves, revival broke out! What is God asking you to do? How can you obey Him...today? Remember that delayed obedience is really disobedience.

The story about the Southwest Airlines plane that had an engine explode and kill a passenger is so tragic. It was great to hear how some heroes worked to pull the passenger back into the plane. It was also cool how the pilot, a committed Christ-follower, performed under pressure and landed the plane. She's a member of the First Baptist Church of Boerne, Texas and those who know her said that she sees her role as a pilot as part of her purpose in life.

There's another element to this story that I want to focus on. When the oxygen masks came down, many passengers put them on incorrectly. Instead of placing them over their mouths and noses, most passengers simply put them over their mouths. According to experts, breathing only through the mouth can block sufficient flow of oxygen to the lungs. Using the nose to breathe creates greater air pressure and gives the lungs more time to extract oxygen from the air. Mouth breathing is considered inefficient, and can actually cause hyperventilation, rather than prevent it.

The pilot did what she was trained to do while the passengers who heard about how to use the oxygen masks, tuned out their training, like many of us do when we fly. When the safety talk begins, most of us check our news feeds or stare out the window or go to sleep. The flight attendants end up sounding like Charlie Brown's teacher – “*wuh, wah, mwah, mwah.*”

I wonder how many of us do this with God's Word? We hear it, but we often don't heed it. So now that we've heard it, what is God asking you to do?

It's never too late to do what's right as long as we keep the main thing the main thing.

Is there anything that's stealing your focus? What one thing is distracting you from full devotion to Christ? It really comes down to priorities, doesn't it? When we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness life will come into focus.

Closing Video: [The Blur](#)

It's time to put first things first by keeping the main thing the main thing.

New Members

Saturday Night

Rick and Kathleen Bucher

MaryAnn Barnett

Kaysie Byles

Dewey and Carol Jacks

Joe and Brittney Perez

Sunday 10:45

Tom and Sue Hammar

Scott and Molly Shattuck