

Small Group Guide

PURSUING GOD'S PRESENCE

The Church at Brook Hills, Dr. Jim Shaddix

August 30, 2009

Haggai 1:1-15

This guide is designed to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use, and there may be instances when you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience, not complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool rather than a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Share a time when you or someone in your family used something in a way that it was not originally intended to be used – the more creative or bizarre the story, the better! Then ask other group members to share some experiences of their own. (*for example: tried to catch a mouse with a Tupperware bowl and spatula; your kid tried to jump off the roof with an umbrella or pillow case; used an old golf club and water hose in an impromptu winch, etc.*)

Ask why people chose to use those things in ways they were never intended to be used. Even if it seems convenient or beneficial in the moment, what happens if you continue to misuse things from the purpose for which they were designed?

After a time of sharing, explain that today's message will look at the way God's people can meet the desires of the moment but to properly use possessions for His purposes; a shift in priorities must occur to recognize God's glory as the greater immediate need than personal comforts.

Option 2

Invite volunteers to share about an unfinished project that was started with great enthusiasm. (a project on the house/ on the car/ a degree/ a new hobby/ a tree house/ a book, etc.) What was/is it? Why is it yet unfinished? What does not completing the project reveal about our priorities?

Emphasize that while we may value something and embrace the challenge or the excitement of the newfound sense of purpose, priorities sometimes change and we either abandon the idea or get "too busy" with other things.

Explain that today's lesson will examine what happens when the people of God begin to lose their passionate pursuit of God and settle into their own routines, pursuing personal comforts over God's pleasure.

Review the Message . . .

Though still under foreign rule (Persian Empire), the Israelites had returned from exile and been granted permission to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonians. Not only have they been granted personal freedom, being released from

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oppressive captivity, they have been allowed to reestablish the physical representation of the LORD's glory and presence among them. Reconstruction began in 538 BC, roughly 50 years after its ruin, but after only 9 months the enthusiasm wore off and labor ceased. God sent a prophet named Haggai in 520 BC to rekindle the passion of Israel to rebuild the temple. He spoke to the people who had grown cool and distant to God and His purposes and priorities, being self-consumed with their own lives and pleasures.

Ask a volunteer to read Haggai 1:1-15.

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What's the connection?

- **God's presence among His people is the ultimate expression of the Old Testament temple.**
- **Christ is the One who builds His Church, but His followers are the crew He uses.**

Discussion . . .

- What do you think of when you hear the word *temple*? What images come to mind? What words describe your immediate feeling or the feelings you would expect to feel entering a temple? Do you immediately associate a temple with your own faith or with other religions? What do you know about the Israelites temple(s)?
- What main differences are there between the Old Testament understanding of relating to God in the temple and the relationship with God made possible in the New Testament?
- What role did the temple play in the Old Testament; what was its significance?
- Do worship buildings today hold for us any similar significance? Is there any correlation between the temple and the local church or the global Church in significance? If so, what are the similarities; if not, what are the differences?
- What does the Bible say about "church growth strategies?" Who builds the Church? What role do we play? What is the foundation of the Church? What does that mean? What is God's goal for the Church? Do our lives individually, as a small group, and as a local church line up with this definition?

Application . . .

- Like icons representing powerful programs on your computer, how do the Old Testament practices (temple, sacrifice, purification laws, etc) represent and point to a greater truth? What Old Testament "icons" do you see expanded and fulfilled as they are opened up through Christ in the New Testament?

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- Do most people prefer understanding or experience in relation to God? What is the reason for your answer? How seriously does God take people experiencing Him practically and functionally, not just accepting Him theologically and theoretically?
- How is grace connected to work? How do Christians mistakenly neglect work?

What's the problem?

- Living in excess while neglecting God's presence. (Haggai 1:2-4)
- Interpreting economic stress and vain effort incorrectly. (Haggai 1:5-6,9-11)
- Seeking personal comfort instead of God's pleasure and glory. (Haggai 1:7-8)

Discussion . . .

- Read Haggai 1:1. Point out that the first day of the sixth month in the Jewish calendar would have been equivalent to August 29th of our calendar. Without drawing a strict parallel to the date, challenge your group to listen to what God may be saying to them in this season of their own lives as they hear what He said to His people in the midst of physical, financial, and spiritual drought, 2500 years ago.
- Read Haggai 1:2. What is the significance of God's name: *LORD Almighty (lit. of hosts/armies)*? Considering His ultimate authority, what is the significance of the fact that God is quoted as saying *this people*? Is there an implied disconnect and distance?
- Read Haggai 1:3-4. How does God redirect His people's sense of urgency and timing? What do the "paneled houses" of God's people in contrast to their investment and involvement in the rebuilding of the temple reveal about their priorities? And their heart?
- Read Haggai 1:5-6. What things are mentioned in the verses? Are they basic needs or luxuries? (work, food/drink, clothing, money) At what point is satisfaction obtained in these things? How much is enough? What does God say about selfish pursuit?
- Read Haggai 1:9-11. What "cause and effect" is being described here? Is it fair to say that sometimes bad situations are brought on people by God and/or as a result of their sinfulness? Even natural disasters? Even financial crisis? How had the people misinterpreted their circumstances?
- Read Haggai 1:7-8. Again God is referred to as LORD of hosts. What motivation should the fact that the LORD does not owe any explanation, yet provides one, give His people? How specific is God about us living for God's glory and His pleasure?

Application . . .

- Like God's people in verse 2, how can we take God's presence for granted? What are some things He has clearly instructed you to do that you don't deny, but you delay?

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- What practical steps do you take to ensure that God's presence is valued above all other things in your own life? Where are you out of balance in your own priorities? How are you choosing to allow part of God's mission to *lie in ruin*? How are you allowing God to speak through your words/example to call His people to action?
- Verse 9 describes people *busying themselves*; this word literally means *you are running for...* Could you run around all day and become too busy or tired when it comes to participating in God's work?
- What are some ways people try to explain away or justify their situation or lifestyles? Are so-called "spiritual" excuses ever made to put off practically pursuing God's will?
- God takes action in various ways to get people's attention, calling them back to valuing Him, and reminding them of His mission... Has He done this at times in your life? How?
- If Jesus were to literally show up right now, walking through the door and asking us if we were serious about pleasing Him, what would our response be? (Keep in mind that He knows our hearts!)
- What brings pleasure to God? How can we intentionally pursue those things?

What must we do?

- **Obey God regarding the urgency of pursuing His presence. (Haggai 1:12a)**
- **Fear God and the consequence of failing to pursue His presence. (Haggai 1:12b)**
- **Work for God by pursuing His presence in the power of His Spirit. (Haggai 1:13-15)**

Discussion . . .

- Read Haggai 1:12. Who responded to Haggai's message? (Look back to 1:1 for the significance of the men specifically named in along with all of God's people) How did they respond? Why did they listen? What does this reveal about the proper response of God's people to His Word?
- Read Haggai 1:13. What comfort should this give to Haggai's audience? Is there any significance to the timing of this declaration from the LORD (following the people's fear and obedience)?
- Read Haggai 1:14-15. What two actions took place in these verses? (*God stirred their spirits, they worked on His temple*) Would it be more accurate to say the people were working for God or working with God? Is there a considerable difference, especially in light of the first part of the chapter? What change took place between the distance in verse 2 ("this people") and the devotion in verse 14 ("their God")?

Application . . .

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- Why is it important to join God in His work, rather than to seek our own plans, however supposedly well intended? Is it possible for personal plans and motivations to be “well intended” yet not aligned with God’s will?
- What does it mean to fear the LORD? How does being “scared” of consequences have anything to do with understanding who God is, who we are, and the great gap between the two? Does your life and/or our group practically demonstrate this fear? How does fear relate to honor?

How do we do it?

- **Restore sinning members. (Matthew 18:15-20)**
- **Minister to the suffering. (Matthew 25:31-46)**
- **Make Christ’s disciples among all people. (Matthew 28:18-20)**
- **Pursue Christ’s greater works. (John 14:12-18)**
- **Love and obey Christ. (John 14:23)**
- **Abide in Christ. (John 15:1-5)**
- **Share Christ with others. (Acts 1:8)**
- **Repent of sin and trust Christ alone for salvation. (Acts 2:38)**
- **Pray for bold witnessing. (Acts 4:23-31)**
- **Flee sexual immorality. (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)**
- **Avoid binding relationships with unbelievers. (2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1)**
- **Yield to the Spirit, not the flesh. (Galatians 5:16-25)**
- **Understand and embrace who you are in Christ. (Ephesians 3:14-19)**
- **Turn from worldliness to godliness. (James 4:5-10)**
- **Abandon the middle and get on fire for Christ. (Revelation 3:14-22)**

Discussion . . .

- Read over this list of biblical action steps. Ask for a specific reason why each of these summarized steps are included in this list. “Why is _____ important in pursuing God’s presence?”
- Read any of the supporting scripture references needed for clarification or support as time allows in your discussion.
- Which of these steps is the easiest? Why?
- Which of these steps is most challenging? Why?
- Which are you admittedly neglecting, putting off, or flat out ignoring? Why?

Application . . .

- How can we encourage one another to pursue these things that are specifically detailed in scripture? What steps are you committing to take in God’s strength in order to fully experience His presence and make His glory known to the world?