

# BECOMING PILLARS IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

## *What Happens When We Neglect God's Work*

### **Haggai 1:1-11**

Created by *Dale Ohmart*

Big Idea: *If a person is feeling dry and disappointed with life, the reason may be that they have neglected God's purpose in their lives.*

Nearly three weeks have passed since Katrina slammed into the Gulf coast. According to a story posted Saturday on the MSNBC website<sup>1</sup>, approximately 40% of New Orleans is still covered by water, though the deepest sections are only about five feet deep now rather than twenty. Mayor Ray Nagin believes that up to 180,000 people could begin returning to the city over the next week, though most other officials have doubts about that timetable. No matter when it happens, it will be a lot of work to reclaim, rebuild and restore what has been destroyed.

Can you imagine what these people are facing? And here's another interesting question to consider. If you were in a position to choose, what would be rebuilt first? According to the article I read, the business owners that are being encouraged to return as soon as possible are going "to get a head start on opening the rollicking bars, stores and restaurants that keep the good times rolling in New Orleans." Is that what you would prioritize? Or would you focus first on another business district...or even the homes?

The situation in New Orleans is not unlike the situation of the Jewish nation about five centuries before Jesus Christ was born, when they returned after several decades to the city of Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by war. The Jews of that generation had to reclaim, rebuild and restore their city, just like the citizens of New Orleans.

The problem was that they put the priority on the wrong type of rebuilding. So God sent the prophet named Haggai to call them back to the right program. Here's how his message begins...

#### **Haggai 1:1-11 (NLT<sup>2</sup>)**

*<sup>1</sup>On August 29 of the second year of King Darius's reign, the LORD gave a message through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. <sup>2</sup>"This is what the LORD Almighty says: The people are saying, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house—the Temple.'"*

---

<sup>1</sup> "Big Doubts In The Big Easy." Associated Press, September 17, 2005. Copyright © 2005 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

<sup>2</sup> Scripture marked NIV taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

<sup>3</sup>So the LORD sent this message through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup>"Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? <sup>5</sup>This is what the LORD Almighty says: Consider how things are going for you! <sup>6</sup>You have planted much but harvested little. You have food to eat, but not enough to fill you up. You have wine to drink, but not enough to satisfy your thirst. You have clothing to wear, but not enough to keep you warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!

<sup>7</sup>"This is what the LORD Almighty says: Consider how things are going for you! <sup>8</sup>Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD. <sup>9</sup>You hoped for rich harvests, but they were poor. And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the LORD Almighty, while you are all busy building your own fine houses. <sup>10</sup>That is why the heavens have withheld the dew and the earth has withheld its crops. <sup>11</sup>I have called for a drought on your fields and hills—a drought to wither the grain and grapes and olives and all your other crops, a drought to starve both you and your cattle and to ruin everything you have worked so hard to get."

Beginning today, we are going to study through the writings of this prophet who had the audacity to suggest that the first thing that needed to be rebuilt in Jerusalem was God's house. Somehow, I want to find a way to grapple with the same emotions that Haggai's listeners must have felt. This is not an easy message to swallow. Haggai is saying that these people were at fault for putting the priority on their own homes and businesses in rebuilding their city.

Is that the message our own nation needs to hear? Does our Creator have any less of a right to be first place now? Of course, there are differences in how that focus is expressed. For Haggai's generation, the Temple represented God's presence. It was in the temple that the people expressed their devotion. Our generation doesn't have the temple. Instead, we have the church...not in the form of a building. I'm talking about the Body of believers who represent God's presence in this world. I believe that the place we give the church in our lives equals the place we give to God. When we put our businesses and our jobs ahead of the church in our schedules, we are putting our businesses and our jobs ahead of God. When family comes before the church, we are putting family before God. When our plans for entertainment or home maintenance or any other activity takes precedent over the church, we are putting those things before God.

Now, I hope you will be patient with me as I try to explain what I mean and why I say it. I am not saying that any person who has to work on Sunday has got their priorities out of order. The issue is not merely attendance. The issue has more to do with being engaged in the process. I think it is quite possible to be deeply involved in building the church and miss attending several Sunday mornings during the course of the year. It isn't my preference for anybody to do that, but it is possible.

But before we get any further into that, let me explain why the church is so important.

### **Ephesians 2:20-22 (NLT)**

<sup>20</sup>We are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. <sup>21</sup>We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. <sup>22</sup>Through him you Gentiles are also joined together as part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit.

In God's eyes, the church is supposed to be a single entity with many individual parts. That united entity is the place where God Himself chooses to live. When the life of any individual is not solidly tied into this body, it raises serious questions about his or her relationship with God. Let me be very blunt about this...the Bible seems to say in no uncertain terms that you cannot have a relationship with Him if you choose not to become part of His church! God loves individuals, yes...but Jesus died for the Church. Jesus is coming back to take the Church out of the world. The Church is the Bride of Christ. And the Bible says that God speaks to the world through the Church.

**Ephesians 3:10** (NIV<sup>3</sup>)

*<sup>10</sup>His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms...*

Can you honestly say that your life contributes to that purpose? Are you somehow involved in communicating God's wisdom into this world? Are people deciding to invite Jesus Christ into their lives as a result of your influence? Is the faith of someone else deepening because of how God has used you?

Let those questions sit on a shelf in your minds for a moment while I shift gears and ask you another set of questions. Do you feel like your life is running in circles? Does it seem like you never have quite as much results as you ought to have from your efforts? Have you noticed that you have this ongoing sense of dissatisfaction constantly eating away at your soul?

Here's what **Haggai 1:1-11** seems to be saying...**DISAPPOINTMENT (in your life) may come from DISTRACTION and/or DISINTEREST in the things that matter most.** When people are genuinely focused on the things that matter most, they experience a sense of positive momentum. They realize that the negatives exist...but they don't let the negatives get in the way. Let me try to illustrate that by sharing a list someone created called:

#### REASONS I STOPPED ATTENDING FOOTBALL GAMES/Church<sup>4</sup>

1. Every time I went, they asked me for money.
2. The people sitting next to me didn't seem very friendly.
3. The seats were too hard.
4. The coach/Pastor never came to call on me.
5. The referee/Deacons made a decision I disagreed with.
6. I was sitting with hypocrites - they came only to see what others were wearing.
7. Some of the games/services went into overtime and I was late getting home.
8. The band/Choir did songs I didn't like.
9. The games/services were scheduled when I wanted to do other things.
10. My parents took me to too many games/churches when I was growing up.
11. Since I read a book about football/religion, I know more than the coaches/pastors do anyhow.

Can you imagine anybody deciding not to go to any more football games for those reasons?!? But those are the reasons people usually decide to change churches or to stop going to church all together. The real truth is that

---

<sup>3</sup> Scripture marked NIV taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. The "NIV" and "New International Version" trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society. Use of either trademark requires the permission of International Bible Society.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted From: [otchurch@aol.com](mailto:otchurch@aol.com). Copied from a post of Sermon Fodder and Joke A Day Ministries. To subscribe go to <http://www.sermonfodder.com> or drop an email note to [Sermon\\_Fodder-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:Sermon_Fodder-subscribe@yahoo.com).

when people are genuinely interested in the things that matter most, they experience a sense of positive momentum that doesn't let negatives get in the way. With football, love of the game and loyalty to a team overcome a lot of negatives. But football won't bring ultimate satisfaction into our lives (although, I do have to admit that I will get a burst of it from watching the Chiefs beat the Raiders this evening). What does bring that ultimate satisfaction?

**Matthew 6:33** (CEV)

<sup>33</sup>*But more than anything else, put God's work first and do what he wants. Then the other things will be yours as well.*

That's one of those key verses in the Bible that summarizes a timeless truth. Like a lot of those verses, somebody decided to highlight it by adding a melody. I learned it as a kid. Maybe you did, too. (If you did, why not pause for a moment, close your eyes and sing it.) The question is, are you obeying the command that is there? Is doing God's work really your first priority? We all "know" it is supposed to be. And if you really "know" that is how it's supposed to be, then consider another timeless principle found in the Bible...

**James 4:17** (NLT)

<sup>17</sup>*Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.*

Jesus told a story one time about the expectations He has for the people who claim to be part of His body. He talked about a master who gave *talents* to three different servants. A *talent* was a sum of money in that generation. So the master went away, expecting that his servants would carry on his business using the resources he had given them. When he got home, the master had an accounting session and learned that two of the servants had been very successful. But when the third servant came in, all he had was the original money. That servant had simply kept the money intact, and used all his time and energy to do other things. And Jesus concludes His story by saying that servant was *useless*.

**Matthew 25:14-30** (NLT)

<sup>30</sup>*Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

That's a scary thought...a thought that a lot of Christian people don't really want to face. But the fact is that throughout the Bible, we are clearly taught that if we are not actively engaged in God's work and being productive, we don't really belong to His family.

Have you ever wondered what that servant did with his time? I wonder if he was remodeling his house...maybe adding on a room or something. Maybe he had a second job on the side. He might have had season tickets to the professional sports teams in his town. No doubt, he was probably in church two or three Sundays each month.

OK, servants in that time didn't have second jobs and they didn't have the resources to engage in the entertainment that was available to their masters. But my point is that he filled up the time he was supposed to have devoted to his master's business with other things. And I wonder how many of us are doing the same thing.

In His mercy, God does something that gives us a chance to recognize our distraction and change the course of our lives when that happens. When we neglect our Father's work, we experience our Father's discipline. To the people of Haggai's generation, that meant having almost but not quite enough. It meant harvests that were meager shadows of the records they should have set. And it may very well be that the difficulties you are

experiencing in your life right now are God's way of calling you back to the focus you ought to have. **God's DISCIPLINE fosters DEVOTION.**

**Hebrews 12:5-6 (MSG<sup>5</sup>)**

*<sup>5</sup>So don't feel sorry for yourselves. Or have you forgotten how good parents treat children, and that God regards you as his children? My dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline, but don't be crushed by it either. <sup>6</sup>It's the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects.*

My freshman year in college was one of the most difficult years of my life. Everything seemed to go wrong. More than anything else, I felt this pressure in my soul that just wouldn't go away. Gradually, I began to realize that the source of my problem was my attitude. I was at a Bible college learning about ministry, but I wasn't really focused on building God's kingdom. I was somewhat disillusioned with church life, so I had decided I would try to become a traveling singer and speaker. That looked like a good way to follow God's calling in my life without dealing with the messy problems that I knew from experience would be part of the territory of being a pastor. But God wouldn't have any part of that. Certainly, He has called some people to travel and sing and speak...but He intended for my life to plug into a community and a church and devote my energies to building His kingdom that way. As soon as I accepted that realization, my soul experienced peace.

I'm not saying that everybody who has difficulties has their priorities out of line. But I do know that we need to keep examining our lives to make sure we are attending to our God given focus. And when that sense of dissatisfaction refuses to leave your soul, you need to do something about it.

- Maybe you need to get involved in working with the kids on Sunday morning or Wednesday evening.
- Maybe you need to strengthen your commitment to being here on Sunday morning.
- Maybe you need to stop letting things interrupt your commitment to a LifeTeam.
- Maybe you need to be a little more lovingly aggressive when it comes to inviting your friends to come to church with you.

Those are just a few suggestions about how you can, as **Haggai 1:8** puts it...

*...go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD.*

No, we don't need to build a physical temple. Instead, we need to be devoted to building a place for God in the lives of our children, our neighbors, our co-workers, our friends and acquaintances.

Of course, it may be that the lack of peace in your soul is coming from the fact that you don't yet have a relationship with the Lord. Does that describe you today? If so, what is it that keeps you from inviting Him to be your Savior? LifeSpring exists to help people nurture a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. Sure, change can be kind of scary. But I can guarantee you that the changes God brings into your life will be desirable and good. And if that sounds attractive to you, it would be my pleasure to help you take your next step in your journey toward forever in God's family.

---

<sup>5</sup> Scripture marked MSG are taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.