

Consider Your Ways

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Date: 01 March 2026

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[0 : 00] Thank you so much, Tash. Please keep your Bibles open there. Let me pray for us as we start. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this enormous privilege of gathering together around your word and listening to you speak to us.

And we pray that our hearts would be stirred, that we would obey, we would listen, and that we would be challenged and encouraged today. And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let me tell you about what Christianity is all about. It's about Jesus and he saves people who trust in him. He frees. He frees you if you trust in him.

And he frees you from a place of death. And he gives you forgiveness and a future and the highest calling and a purpose all for free.

If you're new to church, how does that sound? Sounds really good, doesn't it? Now we're starting a series in the book of Haggai, in the book of the Bible.

[1 : 16] And the story of what happens to people who trust in Jesus, just like I laid out there, is very, very similar to what happened to God's people in Haggai's day.

They were in a place of death, in exile from God, enslaved by the Babylonians, but God freed them. A chance to be forgiven again, a future again, a high calling, a purpose he gave them for free.

And that purpose, this is really important, that purpose is to build, rebuild God's temple after it was smashed by the Babylonians who took them into exile. If you don't know much about God's temple, it was the heart of all of God's purposes in the world.

It's really hard to say how significant it was. It's where God met with his people, where forgiveness was found. And to be involved in that, to rebuild that, was just the highest calling.

18 years have passed since they've been brought back. The very thing they've been saved to do. Look down at your Bibles.

[2 : 29] Verse 2. They say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house. Oh, it's just not the right time yet.

It's just not the right season for us right now. I mean, we want to build, but we're just quite busy at the moment. Just quite busy at the moment. Just not right now.

You know, later, but not right now. You know? Freed, rescued, given an amazing purpose. To say not now, not today, that is a tragedy.

And sadly, a very similar thing can happen with us. Freed, rescued, given an amazing purpose.

To say not now, to the work that God gives us to do, is a tragedy. Haggai is here to expose us.

[3 : 29] Dispose the tragedy of that. But like us, the people in Haggai's day are feeling a bit discouraged.

A little bit apathetic. But he doesn't just, so he doesn't just expose. He encourages. So firstly, let's get clear on this.

The time to build God's house is now. The time to build God's house is now. Have a look at verse 2.

These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the Lord's house.

Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai. Is it time for you yourselves to be living in panelled houses? While this house remains in ruins? Can you hear the sarcasm there?

You know, it's not time, is it? It's not the right season, is it? Well, it sure seems like the season for some sort of building going on. Your house. Yeah, that word panelled houses is a luxury material.

[4 : 33] Actually, the material that was supposed to be used to build the temple. So you can imagine God saying, you know, nice extension you've got there. Oh, nice lick of paint you've got on your walls.

Yeah, great. Look at my house. It's in rubble. Ruins. They've got quite a nice middle class excuse here, haven't they?

Sounds reasonable. But God exposes his people in Haggai. And they needed it because they're not actually the worst of the worst. They're not doing the stereotypically bad sins that you sort of sometimes see in this part of the Bible that God's people are doing.

But their problem then was so subtle, it just needed that little question from God to get them thinking, to get them realising this, that they've got the wrong priorities.

They've got the wrong priorities. The time to build God's house is now. Now let's get clear on what building God's house, what does that mean for us?

[5 : 46] And we might literally think it's kind of making this building a bit bigger. Okay, it's not that. Or maybe going to Israel to build another temple. It's definitely not that. That's not how the Bible talks about building God's house.

God's house is a shadow. God's house is a shadow of something greater. Jesus said, I will raise this temple in three days.

Destroy this temple, I will raise it in three days. And it says that he was talking about the temple of his body. The temple is Jesus.

And when we trust in him, we, the church, are living stones like we saw in 1 Peter. We're living stones in that temple. So building God's house, here it is, is investing in Jesus and investing in his people.

Is that clear? And here's the thing. It's easy to see how they might have forgotten how central building God's house is. I think the same can probably be said for us too.

[6 : 52] Isn't it really easy to say, not now. I'm doing my GCSEs. Not yet. I just had this promotion. Not yet.

The grandchildren have arrived. Not yet. Work is intense. Not yet. Sometimes there are legitimate reasons.

There are legitimate reasons. Like genuine seasons of illness. You're limited in some way. But that's the thing. In Haggai, this is not just a season, is it?

Haggai isn't addressing people going through a season. It's been 18 years. They're not people without capacity. They're just prioritising the wrong thing.

And you can imagine they believed that lie that sometimes we can believe. Well, I'll get my study, my GCSEs out of the way. And then I'll kind of invest in Jesus and church.

[7 : 53] But then what happens? You know, A-levels come along and university comes along. And it just kind of gets harder, actually, in A-levels, by the way. Well, fine. You know, I'll get my studying out of the way.

And then, you know, then work happens. You know, most of us here are in work. And actually, you don't really have much time, do you? We don't have much time. Well, fine.

I'll just work really hard now so that I can get a better job. Well, I'm a little bit freer. And I'm kind of higher up the ladder so that I can let other people do the work. And I can just sit there and not do much. I mean, does it really work like that?

No. Longer hours, more responsibility. Well, fine. I'll just wait until I'm retired. I wonder if you talk to most people here who are retired.

Are you free? You know, it's very busy, isn't it? It's always very busy. But none of those things are bad things. It's not build God's house, not your house.

[8 : 51] But what place do they take in your life? What comes first? What fills up your calendar first? It really is about priorities, order.

Are you building your house, your career, your family, your comfort, your future? Are you building that as an end in itself?

I think that's a really subtle distinction, isn't it? Maybe we should ask ourselves this question as well.

Are we quite busy in church life, but not actually doing much building?

It's possible to do lots of churchy looking things. You know, you can even be on lots and lots of rotors. But building up the body is less about activity, much more about genuinely investing in each other.

Forming those deep relationships. Discipling one another. Seeing each other grow. Now, one of our goals at Bethel this year is to cut that busyness so we can actually get on with the real building work.

[10 : 04] Investing each other, growing around the word. I think Haggai is a great book for us to hear, isn't it? As a reminder. There's never a perfect moment to start prioritising.

There's never such a thing really as later, if we're honest. The time to build God's house is now. It's a challenge.

I can't soften that. You know, I heard this quote recently about what the job of a preacher is. The job of a preacher is to deliver the king's mail. That's an American saying that. Deliver the king's mail. Not rewrite it. To read it out. And translate it to our culture. Or context. It is a challenge.

But it's a challenge from God himself that comes from a place of love. Because this is what he says to us next. Is prioritising building your house, is that actually doing it for you?

[11:09] Is that actually doing it for you? Prioritising building your house, we're going to see, doesn't fulfil. Have a look at verse 5.

Look down. Verse 5. Now this is what the Lord Almighty says. Give careful thoughts your ways. How's it going? Verse 6.

You have planted much, but half is little. You eat, but you never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You owe wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.

Here's the thing, half round, you know, consider this. Is this doing it for you? Look at your life. You wanted it to be fulfilling, didn't you?

It's just not turning out how you want it to be, is it? Really? What do you think? Now the first instance, I think these are covenant curses.

[12:08] Now they were under that old covenant system, remember? Obey, get physical blessings, and disobey, get physical curses. Right? And then exile, just before this, was the ultimate example of that.

Separation from God. Separation from the source of all life. And it really just summed up as futility and death. They had no future there in exile. It wasn't good for them in exile.

It was a horrible way of life. But here's a shock. You know, because not building God's house is described here as covenant curses. You can look back in Deuteronomy and Leviticus to see that. He's basically saying, this is a life that just matches up with that old life you had in exile. Futility and death. He says, what's going on, he says, in your lives right now?

It's not a neutral thing. Look, we're not under covenant curses anymore. That covenant, if we trust in Jesus.

[13:11] Jesus takes the curse for our disobedience at the cross. He gives you physical blessings in heaven when you trust in him. We get the spiritual blessings now.

But there is a sense where when you go back to those old ways that you're saved from, just like them, a slavery to materialism, a slavery to self, a slavery to a world that just crumbles away ultimately.

It's as futile as slavery in exile. Futility and death. So no wonder it is unfulfilling to live like this.

Look at verse 5 again with that in mind. Give careful thought to your ways. How's life actually going for you? You have planted much but harvested little. All that work you put in to climbing the ladder. Or giving yourself to a hobby. Did it give you what you wanted? Was it worth working that hard for this retirement you're enjoying?

[14:18] Verse 6. You eat but never have enough. You drink but never have your fill. You put on clothes but are not warm. You know, those designer clothes you bought, do they actually fulfill you? The stuff you've accumulated.

Has it satisfied? Verse 6. You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it. It's a funny phrase, isn't it? I think it's saying, you know, inflation just makes your money worthless.

Stock markets crash. And really, you never really save enough money up to buy things you want. Because there's always some kind of bill that you have to pay for. You know, it catches you out.

The boiler breaks or something. Money just falls away somewhere.

Give careful thought to your ways, he says. That is not the good life. That's the dead end life. That you were saved from. Is that old way of life actually doing it for you?

Now, many of us went to see Ace. The TV star, ex-gladiator guy who became a Christian. And this is what he said. He said, he had all the fame and fortune in the world. Sum it up.

[15:30] And he hit something called the pleasure paradox. The more you try to be satisfied in the things of this world, the more you try to invest in the things of this world, the less it will fulfil you.

You have to kind of keep coming back for more. And actually, there isn't more. It's a world that actually runs dry. Isn't it so true? This is what someone else has said.

But it's very helpful. Materialism is the unreliable and inevitably unfulfilling master. It is a master, isn't it? It's a slavery to a tyrant where you get nothing back.

That's not what we're saved for. That's what we were saved from. Why would you ever want to go back? Here's the good news of the gospel.

Christianity. Well, Jesus saves us from that futile life, doesn't he? That unfulfilling life. And he offers us the most purposeful way to live imaginable.

[16:43] Have a look at verse 8. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured, that I may be literally glorified.

We're saved for the highest purpose of all. We saw this a few weeks ago. To build Jesus' house for his glory. The nation surrounding God's throne at the end of time, glorifying God and enjoying God. Drinking from the source of all of life itself. That is where everything's heading. And Jesus has put us on that path to that destination. We get to do that now.

Also, I think as we build for Jesus' glory, I think it's a way to receive from Jesus. To be with Jesus. The other week, we were around my parents' house and Daisy, one of my daughters, she just kind of out of the blue said to my dad, she said, Papa, please can I help you unload the dishwasher? She didn't mostly want to unload the dishwasher. But she did see helping her papa was a chance to be with her papa. Serving Jesus and his people is a chance to be with Jesus.

[17:59] And know him more. Do you ever feel that restlessness? You're striving for something in life and it's just not doing it for you.

Come to Jesus. Come back to Jesus. He's the bread of life. He is that well that never runs dry. He died on the cross to offer you this for free. We get to just join in. Come and serve a saviour who's all satisfying, he says.

If you turn from your old life to trust in him. And then come and invest in his people. Get stuck in. Truly be a part, a committed member of God's eternal family where you can enjoy brotherly and sisterly relationships which start now and go on forever.

That sounds great, doesn't it? Which one sounds better? Which one feels like the thing to invest in? To prioritise?

[19:06] Futility? Unfulfillment? Really? Or Jesus? And his people, his body. Jesus' body. Prioritising your house won't fulfil.

We're saved for something much better. Now I've been praying this week that this is the point where we'll hear what Haggai's saying and we'll become like these people now in verse 12. Look at verse 12. Some big names here. Let's see if I can pronounce them. And Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the message of the prophet Haggai because the Lord their God had sent him and the people feared the Lord. They're ready to go. And I hope that we're all ready to go and live out the life that Jesus has purchased for us.

But as we get to those starting, we're on the starting blocks. Maybe you are nervous. You know what prioritising building God's house will mean.

[20:27] It will cost you. It's going to be a sacrifice. It's going to be daunting. It feels daunting. And look, maybe you've got this.

You've totally got this already before you came in here today. There are so many people in this room right now that are already building God's house, most of us. And I really want to recognise that.

And I just want to thank God for how he's worked in you. You are such a blessing to us. But maybe even you are feeling, you know, I get this.

Of course I get this. But I'm just not feeling it right now. I'm discouraged. Maybe you're feeling a bit apathetic. You're putting in the hours. You've made the sacrifices over years of serving at Bethel or another church.

You've come here now. And it's feeling hard. Is it getting to you? Is it getting to you? You might be hesitant to begin.

[21:29] You might be weary to keep going. Haggai gives the exact medicine we all need. God is with you to build his house.

Look down. Verse 13. Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people. I am with you, declares the Lord.

You're nervous because you know that you can't stay the same maybe after hearing Haggai chapter 1. Now, you're not sure whether to keep going.

You're apathetic. You're discouraged. You're jaded. Hear this promise. I am with you, God says, declares the Lord. I am with you when you serve on tea and coffees.

I am with you, James, when you preach a sermon. I am with you when you're sitting with a friend in their sadness this week.

[22 : 34] I am with you. Maybe when you're a bit nervous to welcome people at the door. I am with you when you show up to encourage someone, but you've had a tough week.

I am with you when you just show up. I am with you when you're making that meal for somebody who needs it. I am with you when you meet other brothers and sisters in church in the week.

I am with you, God says, when you're telling someone this good news. I'm with you when you're discouraged. I'm with you when you're jaded.

I'm with you. Where would it be good to know that God is with you? No matter what happens, no matter how much you lose out from prioritising God's house, not yours.

We know that chiefly Jesus takes up this promise. I am with you even until the end of the age. I will never leave you nor forsake you.

[23 : 41] He's the ultimate prize for building God's house, isn't he? Not our happiness, not our glory. We get him. That's what the gospel's about. Not getting stuff from him.

Getting him. And we don't build to get Jesus. We build because we have Jesus. Isn't that brilliant?

And if you haven't got the right heart right now, maybe you're just feeling a bit dead to wanting to serve. He's with you to stir your heart. I think that's why he's with you. Look at verse 14.

So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, government of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, son of Josadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people, everyone.

He's with everyone to work in everyone who trusts in him. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their gods. Three weeks later, I'll translate that for you.

[24 : 47] Don't even think about doing this in your own strength. You can't. We need God to get our hearts in the right place. We need to trust the promise of God that he's with us and he's with us to work in us.

That's a prayer thing, isn't it? We need to pray. That should drive us to our knees. That's not our work. What situation do you need to ask God to stir up your heart for?

Why don't we spend a bit of time asking God to stir our hearts?

Let's pray. Lord, it's a wonderful privilege you've given us. You've saved us. You've freed us. This amazing building project in the world of your church, your people, investing in you, your body.

But we know it's hard sometimes. We know it's tricky to get on. We know there are other things, Lord, to think about. Help us to prioritise your amazing project.

[26 : 02] Help us, Lord. Please stir our hearts, Lord. We can't do this by ourselves. Please be with us. Help us all to know that you are with us. We pray that in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.