

You Were Made For This
Haggai 1
Small Group Guide

Opening Icebreaker Question:

- Are you a do-it-yourselfer? What is your most meaningful, funny, or frustrating home restoration story?

OPTIONAL BACKGROUND READING: Despite numerous warnings by God via his prophets to the nation of Israel in Old Testament times, the people of Israel were unfaithful to Yahweh. Therefore, per his warning he allowed superpowers to conquer parts of Israel (Assyria conquers the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and Babylon conquers the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and its capital city of Jerusalem in 586 BC). In the latter conquest, most of Jerusalem's inhabitants are taken captive, 1100 miles away to the land of Babylon, which we now call Iraq. They stayed there for about 70 years.

In 539 BC, God sent a new, rising power, Media-Persia, led by Cyrus of Persia, to overthrow Babylon. Cyrus would very soon issue a decree allowing the Jewish people to go back to their homeland. He would even send them with resources to start rebuilding. However, the Israelites encountered severe opposition to the rebuilding and so their temple site went untouched for 16 years.

Where we drop in today, a new king named Darius is ruling Persia, and a man named Zerubbabel is the appointed governor of Judah. A man named Joshua is the High Priest in Jerusalem. We don't know much about the man Haggai, other than that he was a prophet who spoke on behalf of God. Chapter 1 plays out on Aug. 29, in the year 520 BC. *Let's read to see how this ancient restoration helps us make sense of life today.*

READ Haggai 1:1-4.

1. What is "the Lord Almighty's" complaint against the Israelites?
2. Why was the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple so important? Why was it different from our modern church buildings? What do we have through Jesus that the Jewish people did not have?
3. God has recently restored them from captivity back to their homeland. How would you feel if you finally gave your teenager the car back after a time of punishment, only to have them use it to skip dinner with family every night this week and miss curfew the first chance they got? Does this shed any light on how God might have felt?

READ vv 5-11

4. This section starts with "Give careful thought to your ways." This is akin to saying, "Think about your life—about how you spend your time and money. What does that say about what you value?" Have you given careful thought to the time you spend with God? What does your time with him say about the quality of your relationship with him?

5. Later God says, “You eat but never have enough.” Have you ever experienced the emptiness of trying to fill the spiritual vacuum in your heart with something other than God? What was it like?
6. Have you ever stopped to think that this “sense of unquenchable thirst in your soul, this dissatisfaction with life, was put there by God to get your attention?” If so, why would God do this? To what purpose? (Leaders: Pastor Josh said that God does this to make us aware that we were made for life with God).
7. Augustine of Hippo, who had experienced every kind of pleasure in his search for the meaning of life, writes this: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”
 - a. What causes you the most unrest? Why do you think that is?
 - b. If God brings us peace and rest, how can we cultivate life in his presence? What practices might get us more in touch with God?

READ vv 12-13

12 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, 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. **13** Then Haggai, the Lord’s messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: “I am with you,” declares the Lord. “This is my work!” God said. “You are not alone to do this with your own resources. I, and everything I have, am at your disposal for this task of enabling people to encounter my presence.”

8. “And the people feared the Lord”: We talked about this last fall. What does it mean to fear the Lord? How do we cultivate this attitude before God?
9. In v13, God says, “I am with you.” What do you think is the connection between obedience/fear of the Lord and God’s presence and assistance? How does this relate to the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20?
10. Pastor Josh said that another way in which Haggai 1 helps us to make sense of our lives is that it shows us the greatest task we’ve been given: Helping other people to identify their longing for friendship with God, or life in his presence. How can we help other people (Christian or non-Christian) to identify their false longings that do not satisfy and to see their true longing for God?
11. Prayer: Pray that God will help us give up our false longings, find our greatest fulfillment in friendship with Him, and discover that our most satisfying work is helping other people to identify their longings for him.