

A New Heart for House-Work

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn back to the book of Haggai in chapter 1. And this morning I want to begin with a confession. And the confession is, I don't love housework.

On a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being housework is a dream, 0 being housework is a total nightmare, on that scale I'm probably a 2 or 3.

I maybe reached a 5 over the months of being stuck at home. But certainly when Susie and I first got married, I felt far short. Susie had been doing up the house for a couple of years, renovating it, redecorating it.

It was a real labour of love. And then I came with all my stuff, my piles of books, my mess, and the housework slowly ground to a halt.

There's still things I haven't found a place for. There's still DIY to be sorted. There's still work to be done. I don't love housework, and I have a very gracious wife.

[1 : 11] But now and then I hear the phrase, the house isn't finished. The house isn't finished. And at the beginning of this short but really punchy book of Haggai, we find God having to tell his people the very same thing.

Look with me, if you would, at verse 4. God asks, Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in panelled houses while this house lies in ruins? The house.

God's house isn't finished. In fact, it's a wreck, a ruin. Notice God's people have become very skilled procrastinators.

They tell themselves, verse 2, The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. Not yet. Tomorrow. Later. And yet, for years, nearly two decades, a shiny new city has gradually, slowly but surely, grown around the pile of rubble that used to be God's house.

The house where God himself promised to live among his people. Where anyone could come and be right with God and have peace again. Where God's presence and glory would be on show to the whole world.

[2 : 30] And yet, in a city full of posh houses, this was the house that was still in ruins. Why was that? Well, Haggai's message comes to a people who have lost their love for God's house, God's being with them, and fallen in love instead with their own houses, their own lives.

Where did their love go? Only a few years previously, God had graciously rescued his people out of exile. Exile, the 70 years of God's house being destroyed.

70 long years of being out of God's presence. But God had promised that wouldn't be the end. He would bring his people back. He would be with them again as their God.

And his people in exile, they longed to be back. To rebuild the temple, to be back with God again. 70 years later, true to his word, God graciously brought his people home.

But what had happened to that love for God? We read in the book of Ezra, as soon as they got home, God's people got on with the work.

[3 : 43] They went to rebuild God's house. But very soon, they hit roadblocks. Their neighbors in the land, they were fiercely against the idea of God's temple being rebuilt.

They filed a complaint to the emperor, and the work drowned to a halt. And so the busy building site fell silent. But it was silent for far too long.

16 years go by. Life has moved on. People have settled down. People have been born. People have died.

Nice houses have gone up. There's a new emperor on the throne. But the house still isn't finished. Why is that? Well, over the years, this fear of opposition, we see, has given way to the basic cares and interests and pleasures of life.

God says, verse 9, my house lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house. See, in their hearts, God's people had all gone home.

[4 : 50] They have lost their love of God being with them. They had fallen in love instead with their own busyness, their own lives. Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways.

Consider your ways. Give careful thought to your ways. Haggai comes with this gracious invitation from God for a people who had lost their way.

This is a short book about God going after his people in love and calling them to come back to him with not just their feet, but with their hearts.

It's a book full of hope because it's a book about a fresh start, a new heart for God. And coming out of such a strange and difficult year, do we not also need that renewal?

in the busyness or the quiet of our own lives? I suspect this is a book for us. It's a book for weary and disappointed saints at the point of giving up.

[6 : 04] It's a book for busy and distracted saints with a thousand other things going through our minds. In short, it's a book for ordinary Christians like me and you who are prone to wonder and who need God to call us back time and again, time and again to see his beauty and to learn to walk closely with him again.

What, I wonder, are our hearts set upon today? What are we working for? What do we treasure?

Well, first and foremost, God calls us through Haggai to treasure his presence.

Treasure his presence. I saw a film recently, a film from about a hundred years ago of the docks in Leith where Susie and I live.

The docks busy, bustling, guys on their shift, guys waiting at the gate, eager to get home. If you go down to the docks today, it's a different story.

It's dead. It's empty. Everyone is gone. Well, that's what Haggai sees when he looks at the wreckage of the temple, once a busy, bustling place of work and worship, now left to rot, overgrown, rubble, everyone's gone home.

[7 : 31] But God has a question to ask about that, verse 3. The word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet. Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins?

See, instead of centering their lives around God's house, God's people have turned to their own home comforts. They've busied themselves with the stuff of life, getting by the busyness of the day-to-day.

But notice verse 5. They're finding even those basic things, they don't seem to work. Consider your ways. You have sown much and harvested little.

You eat, but you never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm, and he who earns wages does so to put them in a bag with holes.

See, their thoughts and hopes and plans are taken up with their own grand designs and their great visions for life, but the reality on the ground, well, it falls far short of the dream, doesn't it?

[8 : 40] Their lives are summed up in that really gutting image of putting their wages into a ripped and torn bag full of holes. It's spilling away. Whatever they've gone out and gained is slipping straight through their fingers.

In short, this new way of life, it's not paying off. They're reporting losses year on year. You see, their self-interest isn't giving them the full and happy life they had hoped for.

And that is reality, isn't it? Our plans can be overturned in an instant. The stuff of this world can be taken away.

Plans can be put on hold. We ourselves have felt that hard, haven't we, this past year? Things that we've never really had to live without. time with family, friends, opportunities to work, to socialize, traveling outside of our homes, outside of our country.

These things were put on hold. Well, it's right to be upset about these things, about so many other things, difficulties obvious and hidden, but we are reminded here that things that can be put on hold aren't designed to fully deliver.

[9 : 58] We cannot get lasting satisfaction out of things that don't last. And for these people who had invested themselves so heavily in fragile, light, temporary things, well, God is graciously showing those things for what they really are.

Verse 9 says, you looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away. I blew it away.

God blew those things away. Perhaps that sounds a bit harsh, a bit petty, but really it's tough love. His people had turned from loving God the giver to loving only his gifts.

So God's blowing those gifts away, well, it's a reminder to them of who he is. He is the Lord of hosts. He is the giver of every good and perfect gift.

He gives and he takes away. And so for as long as these people did not treasure God's being with them and they left his house in ruins, they would never be fully at rest, even in their own nice, comfy poems.

[11:18] God loves his people enough that he doesn't leave us to chase the wind. Sometimes he interrupts our busyness and he puts things on hold, not because he's out to get us or to punish us for some secret sin, but because he loves us too much to let us run after things that cannot satisfy, to be satisfied with anything less than himself.

Jesus Lewis rightly said, too often we are far too easily pleased with our own lives. Like a child, he wrote, who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

sometimes God gently but firmly lifts our heads from staring at the ground to see again the huge horizon of his promises and purposes.

So, friends, today, where are our eyes turned? I wonder, what have we set our hearts on as we come out from such a strange and difficult year in our lives?

One of the really striking things here is that for these returned exiles, their loss of interest in God's presence, well, it started with outside pressures. They hit a roadblock in their circumstances which became a roadblock in their hearts.

[12:55] I wonder if you can relate to that as you look back on the past year. Many of us are coming out of this year with weary and worn out hearts. So, this call for us to consider our ways comes as a gracious invitation to reflect on what it is we've set our hearts on.

We couldn't come together on Sundays for so long. So, ask yourself, do I love God's word and his worship as I did in the past?

We have spent much more time at home, haven't we? So, consider, has my heart turned to the busyness or the quiet of my life rather than the place where God dwells with and among his people, his church?

In short, what is it that occupies our hearts? What do we hope will lift us up and give us strength and keep us going? Is it God the giver? Or is it really only his gifts?

Perhaps some of us this last year can say more than ever that we have been busy with our own houses. Our worlds have shrunk. Perhaps our hearts have become domesticated.

[14:12] Perhaps over the months we have turned in on ourselves. But that is far from the life that God calls us to. We are not a self-preservation society.

We're not called to neglect ourselves. But God calls us to hold all other things with an open hand. Seek first the kingdom of God, says Jesus, and all these things will be added to you.

So as life begins to return to normal, let us consider, give careful thoughts to our ways. How am I planning to enjoy God in these coming months?

Where perhaps have I drifted from loving him with my whole heart, soul, mind, and strength? Where am I holding on perhaps to the gifts and not the giver?

What do I need to change in order to grow in my relationship with God this year? Take some time perhaps to pray through these questions.

[15:18] Let us give careful thought to these things, plan to find rest in God himself, the giver of every good and every perfect gift. Because here we see God was ultimately calling his people back not to a building but to himself.

God sent Haggai to call these returned exiles back to his delight and majesty and glory. See that in verse 8. Consider your ways.

Go up to the mountains, bring wood, and build the house so that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified. God now wants his house raised up.

Why? Because it pleased and glorified him to live with his people. It pleased God to have a place where his people could come back into his presence from the stench of their sins through sacrifices and be right with him again.

It glorified God to have a place where his presence was visibly stamped on the land. Like a king's signet ring stamped into wax. In short, the temple was the sign that God was with his people and his

people were with him.

[16:34] And that pleased God. God saw that that was good. See, if we're wondering today, God doesn't simply put up with being with us.

God's house was a place he took pleasure in. God was never the physical fabric or the costly design of the temple that God loved. God could have sent Haggai, couldn't he, with diggers and a construction crew to throw up a new temple in a week.

But no, instead God sent Haggai after the hearts of his people, not the bricks and mortar. God's work happens first and foremost in here, in the human heart.

hearts. So what pleased and glorified God was dwelling with his people in their lives, among their houses, in a house of his own. Notice, it's fascinating, isn't it, in this chapter, the word temple is never used.

It's their houses and God's house. What does that tell us about the God who we worship? The one who highest heaven could not contain, knelt down so far as to live in a house, to be with his people.

[17:52] That's how near God drew near to them. We think perhaps we see pictures in the back of our Bibles of the size and the greatness and the beauty of the temple, but for God to live there, he still had an infinite distance to bend down, to be with us.

See, the temple was not God's vanity project. It was an incredible display of his grace in kneeling down, condescending to be with his prone to wander people.

And the amazing thing is that God says he takes pleasure in that, that God is glorified by that. So if that was true of the temple back then, well how much nearer has he come?

How much lower has he knelt? How much more was he pleased and glorified to come to us in Jesus Christ? John writes, as we read earlier, the word was with God and the word was God and the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

In Jesus, God took our very flesh and blood, our humanity to be God with us. Not in a house among houses, but in the God man, who walked the dust of this earth, whose eyes felt the sting of tears, whose hands felt the blow of nails.

[19:22] His sacrifice pleased God because it brings us back into his presence fully and finally. His death on the cross was the hour of his glory.

And now God has raised him up that we would treasure him, that he would have supremacy and priority in our lives, that we would be satisfied in him, that we would never be without Emmanuel, God with us.

The people of Haggai's day believed they had everything they could ever need at their fingertips. In reality, all the security they truly had was to be found in God being with them.

God called his people back to throw all their hopes on him and treasure his presence. For them then, that meant rebuilding God's house.

But for us now, we don't have a building to build or to rebuild. The Bible never draws a line between the temple and church buildings. This wonderful building, this is not God's house.

[20:35] God's work today, it's not in bricks and mortar. No, for us now, God calls us to treasure Jesus. God's house is no longer in ruins because Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, never to die again.

Destroy this temple, he said, and in three days I will raise it up. Of course, he was speaking of the temple of his body. So the question for us today is, do we treasure him, the Lord Jesus Christ, as we consider our ways this week?

What place does Jesus have in our lives? You take a look at the diary, is Jesus bolted on to the side of everything else that we've got going on? Or is the whole of our lives centered, shaped around him?

Do we see, is God with us the best thing in life to us? God calls us to treasure his being with us in Jesus Christ. So, friends, let's plan for that.

Let that be the organizing principle for us as we get back into a normal way of life. We need to guard our hearts, don't we, against self preservation mode, where we so easily slip.

[21:55] We need to prayerfully plan our time, our days, our weeks, to give careful thought to our ways. So that we treasure Jesus in our lives. For, says Jesus, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Treasure God's presence. And secondly, more briefly, work on God's house. Work on God's house. The people have heard the message, and in verse 12, we see their response.

Then, Zerubbabel, 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. See, in response to God's word, we see God's people come together to work again on God's house under a dream team.

Haggai, the prophet, and Joshua, the priest, and Zerubbabel, the would-be king, together, they head up the work on God's house. Because we see as they listened to Haggai's words, they recognized the voice of the one who they had drifted away from.

Verse 12, they obeyed the voice of the Lord their God. See, God had sent danger signs, hadn't he? He sent a drought, he blew things away, but ultimately what made the change was God's word.

[23 : 20] If we're wondering today, what is God saying to us? We don't need to look at our circumstances, we don't need to wait for a sign, something to happen in our lives.

He has spoken his message to us in words. And what is his message to us today? Well, verse 13, then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message, I am with you, declares the Lord.

I am with you. This is a point in the passage where I think we can be surprised by grace. Notice the twist here, they were not working so that God would be with them, to earn his presence.

God says he is with them before even they have built his house. The house was simply a sign of his presence with them. God didn't need a house, as if he needed somewhere to sleep or rest or sit.

God doesn't need stuff from us. He calls his people to work with him, not because he needs us, but because he has chosen for us to be part of his plans.

[24 : 34] It's like perhaps tidying up at the end of church. A small child comes, they grab an end of the heaviest object in the room. It's great, isn't it? But it doesn't make carrying the thing any easier.

You pick it up, don't you? You drag it along with them because you value that child, their heart, the relationship you have with them. Our work with God is like that.

He wants us to grab an end, but he's the one carrying the thing. It's his work. He could do it without us, but he chooses not to.

Because his work, first and foremost, it's not out there, it is in here, in the heart. So we stumble along in our work, in his loving strength.

We're never working for his presence. His presence is actually what makes our work possible. I am with you, he says. Remember, this is coming at 16 years later, after 16 years of disinterest, coldness from his people.

[25 : 44] They drifted away for nearly two decades, and yet God comes to them in grace. not to push them away, but to draw near to them, to come close to them.

It's a reminder to us of his incredible patience. He is slow to anger. Perhaps you need to hear that today. However far or for however long you have wandered, there is grace for you in Jesus.

forgiveness. We can never get so deep in sin that God will not take us back and give us work in his kingdom when we come to him for forgiveness.

So as the Lord stirred up the people of God under the dream team, we read verse 14 that they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God. Their love was renewed, and so their hands returned to work.

So then what is the work God calls us to today? Well, it's still house work, but of a completely different kind. Paul says in Ephesians 2 that the church is a holy temple in the Lord.

[26 : 57] He writes, in him, you also are being built together as a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. God is still building a house, and that house is still not finished, not a brick-and-mortar house, but a house made up of ordinary people like me and you who trust in Jesus.

Paul is showing us a picture of the church drawn in the style of the temple. You are now the house of God, he says. God lives in us by his Spirit.

Many people may very well be asking today, where on earth is God? Where is God in our world of pain and darkness? Perhaps that's you today asking that question.

The Bible says that on earth, God lives in his church, in his people, not in the physical fabric of a building, but in and among us.

It's the church today, his people, that puts his presence and glory on display to the world. And so if the church is God's house, what then is our work? Well, Jesus says, doesn't he, I will build my church.

[28 : 11] I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And today the Lord Jesus calls us to toil and graft and work with him for that same purpose, to build his church, his

house, his dwelling place.

Church life has been different, hasn't it, and difficult this past year. But God hasn't stopped building. God hasn't changed.

We can't forget that what God is doing in the world is still centered on his people, still centered on his church. So as we pray for each other, as we serve one another, as we speak the gospel to one another, all the one another's that we see in scripture, God is at work building for himself a place to live.

above all, it says Paul, it's as we speak the truth in love to one another, that the body builds itself up in love. We are called today to spiritual body building, not separately in our own self-interest, but together, stirred and knit together by God's spirit.

It can be frustrating, disappointing. Church life isn't everything we hope for, even at the best of times. times, we grow weary, our hearts turn to other things.

[29 : 36] In those times when we're giving everything we've got and not seeing results, when the things of this world grow bright and the promises of God grow dim, we need to hear this message again, don't we?

I am with you, declares the Lord. I am with you. Jesus is no longer the baby in the stable. nor is he the man on the cross.

He is the risen and reigning Lord, the master architect, the chief builder, and his work in the world today is building his church.

And so, brothers and sisters, are we working with him? As we return to church with our feet, are we returning to him with our hearts, finding simple ways to encourage one another and point one another to Christ as he works in us?

This dream team, Haggai the prophet and Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the would-be king, they point us to the work of Jesus today, who stirs us up and leads us in this work.

[30 : 45] He is our prophet, the very word of God with us. He is our priest who brings us into the presence of God. He is our king who is risen and rules forever over all things and he says to us today, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

So then let us treasure him and let us work with him to build up his house, his church. Let's come to him in prayer.

Let's pray together. God, our Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus. We thank you that you accept us into your presence, not for anything that is in us, but for everything that is in him.

We thank you that he is no longer in the grave, but you raised him from the dead. That was the temple rebuilt. And he sits at your right hand today, praying for us, interceding, building.

His saving work was finished on the cross. He said so. It is finished. And yet he continues to build out of that work on that foundation of his death and resurrection.

[32 : 09] Lord, we worship you for that. We thank you for your Holy Spirit who lives in and among us, who works in us. Father, we simply pray that by your Spirit you would help us to treasure Jesus, to grow in love for him with each passing day, and that you would stir us up not only to love him, but to work with him, to walk with him.

Lord, we pray this for those who do not know you, perhaps friends, perhaps family, Lord, that they too would see Jesus in our words, in our lives, and come to trust him, that they would belong to you, to your house, to your family.

Lord, we long for this. So build your church, we pray in Jesus' great name. Amen. Amen.