

To grow in the Lord, you must invest all of your time, money, strength, talents and life into the things of God. Everything is spiritual! You can't pick and choose what areas of your life are spiritual. As a believer, all things belong to God. This lesson is aimed at helping you grow in all areas of your life.

Key Scripture: Haggai 1:1-2:9

Teaching Aim: To lead members to consider how the use of their time, money, strength, and talent reflect their values and priorities.

Connect with Life: Allow time for members to reflect on the following statement: "As I reflect on this past year, what does how I made use of my time, money, strength, and talent reveal about my values and priorities?"

Ask members to apply this same question to the following three scenarios:

- 1. Susan has had an unusually difficult year. She began a new job and recently re-located to a new residence. Susan feels badly about not having found a new church to attend but there simply has been no time for this. All of her time seems to be required just to do her job and take care of the necessities for taking care of her daily living needs. Oh sure, she tries to take a little time for herself on the week-ends so that she can maintain her sanity. Hopefully, things will get better this next year.*
- 2. To say that this past year has been difficult for Richard financially is a gross understatement. At least he has not lost his job but he has no reason to expect a raise for the new-year. As is true for most people, Richard has decided to save more of his income each month until we get through these difficult times. He will also have to cut back on his charitable giving and his gifts to the church for awhile as well. Hopefully he will not have to follow this practice for more than a year or so.*
- 3. Bob has made several new years' resolutions. He has promised himself and his wife that he will be more faithful to his work-out routine and will be more careful to watch his diet. Bob also has set a goal of running in several marathons this year and hopes to add cycling to his weekly routine. He wants to lower his golf handicap by five strokes and hopes to read at least one new book each month. Bob feels pretty good about his resolutions. He regrets having to turn down the invitation to accept a place of leadership in the church this year but there simply will not be time. Maybe he can do more at the church next year after he has become more efficient with his new work-out schedule.*
- 4. Rita is recognized as one of the best teachers in her school. She has recently been asked to take a position as head of the English department and give leadership to several key work groups at the school where she teaches. The nominating committee at her church has asked Rita to consider accepting a teaching position in their Sunday school but Rita just doesn't see how this will work for her at this time. There are several training opportunities that Rita is considering this summer that will better prepare her for her teaching career. Hopefully after she retires there will be time for teaching at the church.*

After a time of discussion, share with members that the people in Ezra and Haggai's day (25 centuries ago) had the same problem as the people in our day. They were faced with the same choices that we have regarding the use of time, money, strength, and talent. Let's see how they did and examine God's response. We should be able to draw some lessons for our own life's choices for today.

Ask members to identify the lessons we can learn from each section of verses as they are discussed.

Six Lessons Learned

1. We are to remain consistent in our service to the Lord (Haggai 1:1-2).

When the exiles first returned from Babylon, they set about rebuilding the temple right away. Although they began with the right attitudes, they slipped back into wrong behavior, and the work came to a standstill.

QUESTIONS:

- a. Ask members to state some possible reasons for this slowdown in the work.
- b. Who were Zerubbabel and Joshua?
- c. What important work had been completed by this time? (The altar had been built.)
- d. Why do you think they had given up? Busyness? Complacency? Gloating in present accomplishments?

2. God continues to speak to us through his word and his messengers (Haggai 1:3).

Haggai delivered a message to encourage the people to rebuild the temple. **Haggai** was probably born in captivity in Babylon and returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in 538 B.C.

QUESTIONS:

- a. What do we know about **Haggai**? (He was the first prophet after being freed from captivity.)
- b. How much time had passed since the completion of the altar? (About 15 years.)
- c. What other prophets were also used by God as his messengers during this same time period? (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zechariah)
- d. God used messengers (prophets) to speak to people to cause spiritual growth. Who has God been using to speak to you so you would grow? Have you been listening to them or ignoring them?

3. God will not allow us to become totally self-centered with our lives

(**Haggai** 1:4). God asked his people how they could live in luxury when his house was lying in ruins. The temple was the focal point of Judah's relationship with God, but it was still demolished.

QUESTIONS:

- a. What had the people done with their resources in place of rebuilding the temple?
- b. What excuses might they have given for this situation?
- c. What is meant by the term "paneled houses"?
- d. Have you been using your resources for God? How can you use your house? Your cars? Your stuff? What about your kitchen table?

4. God provides for our needs when we put Him first in our lives (Haggai 1:5-11).

The harder the people worked for themselves, the less they had, because they ignored their spiritual lives. Because the people had not given God first place in their lives, their work was not fruitful or productive, and their material possessions did not satisfy.

QUESTIONS:

- a. When did Moses predict a situation like this one? (Deuteronomy 28:38-45)
- b. What did grain, grapes for wine, and olives for oil signify to the Jews? (These were their primary source of financial security.)
- c. In what ways did God punish the people for their unfaithfulness?
- d. What has God provided for you because of putting Him first?
- e. Have you been working for yourself harder than you have been working for God?

5. The glory of God's work is not dependent upon our abilities or talents but His strength and presence (Haggai 2:1-4).

The older people could remember the incredible beauty of Solomon's temple, destroyed 66 years earlier. Many were discouraged because the rebuilt temple was inferior to Solomon's. But **Haggai** encouraged them with God's message that the glory of this temple would surpass that of its predecessor. It was time for the children of Israel to work and no longer be filled with fear.

QUESTIONS:

- a. When was this message given by Haggai? This is Haggai's second message. It was given during the Feast of Tabernacles in October, 520 B.C.
- b. Once again, who was the audience? (Zerubbabel, Judah, and to the people.)
- c. According to Haggai, what is the most important aspect of the temple? (God's presence.)
- d. Do you have a talent or ability that (pridefully) you think the Kingdom of God can't live without?

6. God has chosen to bless us by making our lives the temples of His presence today so that others can see His glory reflected through our lives and actions (Haggai 2:5-9).

The children of Israel had to learn that the glory of the new temple was not in its beauty but in the presence of God. God promised His continued presence in spite of their times of rebellion. He is in control of all of their resources.

QUESTIONS:

- a. What shift in focus occurs in these verses? (From the temple being rebuilt in Jerusalem to the worldwide reign of the Messiah on earth.)
- b. What is meant by the term, "in a little while"? (This refers to God's control in history-he can act any time he chooses.)
- c. What was being included in the reference to the shaking of all nations? (He was speaking of both his present judgment on evil nations and future judgment during the last days.)
- d. What temple should you be building? Hint: Read 1 Corinthians 3:16

Encourage Application: Then lead members to determine summary application statements related to each of the six lessons learned from this study. An idea would be to write these on a large piece of paper as they are shared.

Example answers may be something like:

1. It is not enough to start strong. We must finish strong as well. Let it be our prayer to complete the good work that he begins in us. How are you responding to the times of discouragement and challenge in your Christian walk?

2. We must remain faithful to the study and application of God's Word. This must also be combined with our regular participation in times of worship and response to God's servants through the spoken and written word of God through them.
3. What will be your response in the future to the question asked at the beginning of this study and applied to the four case studies? What will your actions have to say about your values and priorities?
4. Self-centered efforts will never result in needs being met. The choices that we make must reflect our dependence upon God for our resources, not ourselves.
5. Our usefulness to God is not dependent upon the quantity or quality of our time, money, strength, and talent. It is dependent upon the presence and power of God in our lives.
6. We must remember that we are the temples of God presence in our world. The Holy Spirit resides within the hearts and souls of God's children, not in beautiful buildings or glorious surroundings. Do our lives reflect this presence and His glory?

Close with a challenge for members to apply these summary statements to their lives this week.

NOTES BELOW ARE FROM THE WEEKEND MESSAGE

Matthew 13:12 NIV

2 TRUTHS

TRUTH 1: Everything is either growing or dying. Nothing stays the same.

- *Haggai 1:2-11 NIV, The Message*
- *Haggai 2:10-13 NLT*

TRUTH 2: We make the decision of which way we go – forward or backward.

- *Matthew 25:14-29 NIV*

3 PRINCIPLES OF GROWTH AND BLESSING

1. We don't own anything

- *Psalm 24:1 NKJV*

2. We were created by God to bear fruit for Him

- *John 15:8 NIV*

3. God measures His blessings to us based on our capacity to steward

- *Matthew 25:15 NIV*