

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, WI  
October 6, 2019

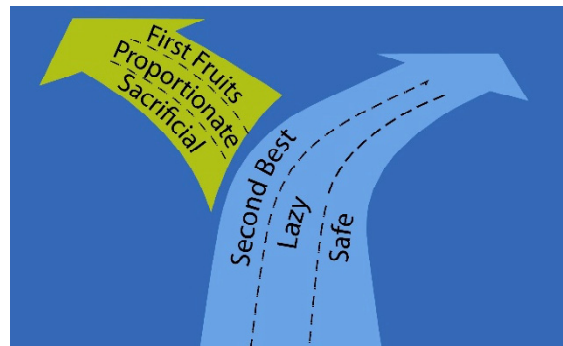
## 10 for 10 Message Series Give Careful Thought to Your Ways Haggai 1:1-15

Can four months change your life? Can four months change your church? Can four months change your nation?

That's what happened between August and November 520 BC.

In this **10 for 10** message series, we are hoping for something similar. There are the three weeks of the message series, and then 10 weeks where we will strive to put the lessons from this series into practice. If these three months change us as individuals, it will change the ministry of God's church, and that is the best way for a nation to be changed – as God's people live out generous, loving lives.

The 10 for 10 diagram features a choice. Do we take the easy path or the road less traveled? Each week we are going to be facing a different choice. This week, do we choose second best or first fruits? Next week, do we choose lazy giving or proportionate giving? The final week will be the choice between safe giving and sacrificial giving.



May the next ten weeks change our lives, so that our families are changed, our church is changed, and perhaps even the trajectory of our nation is changed!

*In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest:*

<sup>2</sup> *This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD's house.'"*

<sup>3</sup> *Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>4</sup> "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"*

Haggai's ministry takes place in the fall of 520 BC. About 19 years earlier, God had graciously brought his people back from exile in Babylon (Read Ezra 1 & 2 for details). It was a time of spiritual renewal and excitement. Immediately the altar was set up and the foundations of the temple were laid. But then the work languished. The answer was always, "Now is not the time." The focus was their own lives and their own comfort. They were giving God their second best. So what were the consequences of their "second best" choices?



### 1. The Consequences of a Second Best Choice

*<sup>5</sup> Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>6</sup> You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."*

*<sup>7</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. <sup>8</sup> Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD. <sup>9</sup> "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. <sup>11</sup> I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands."*

"The harder I work, the behinder I get!" That was the consequence of second best thinking. Give God the second best, and God can make you even farther behind.

For God's people in Haggai's day, it was poor crops and drought. But what about for our day? Do you find yourself putting your money in a purse with holes in it (Haggai 1:6)?

That's what I see in so many of our homes. For example, in my own home, we make an investment in buying a house, and then things start to fall apart.

- Water in the basement
- The deck needs replacing
- The carpet is wearing out
- The kitchen is out of date

- And should I even mention all the weeds in the lawn?

Lots of things distract me and worry me. But there are bigger holes in our purses. It isn't just the financial burdens that God can bring upon us.

We have beautiful homes inside and out, but there are the relationship holes:

- husbands and wives angry and not speaking to each other,
- children feeling ignored or unnecessary,
- abuse is rampant – physical, sexual, emotional,
- anxiety because we never have enough and we never are enough,
- afraid someone might find out that we are really just a hollow shell and not nearly as successful or nice or great as others think.

“More money!” Is that the solution? We are tempted to give God the second best because maybe more money will solve those problems, but if we store up money by giving God the second best, God can just put more holes in our purse.

In fact, there is something even more frightening. Read Haggai 2:10-14.

*<sup>10</sup> On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Haggai: <sup>11</sup> “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Ask the priests what the law says: <sup>12</sup> If someone carries consecrated meat in the fold of their garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, olive oil or other food, does it become consecrated?’”*

*The priests answered, “No.”*

*<sup>13</sup> Then Haggai said, “If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?”*

*“Yes,” the priests replied, “it becomes defiled.”*

*<sup>14</sup> Then Haggai said, “‘So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,’ declares the LORD. ‘Whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.’”*

What is that all about? In Old Testament ceremonial law, defilement is transferred! Anything unclean makes everything it touches unclean.

What defiles something makes it second best. The application to our own Christian giving? It is our sinful heart that touches everything we do and defiles it. Look at Matthew 15:19-20:

*For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile a person.*

What makes something unclean is what comes out our unclean hearts. Others may see what we give and think, “First fruits!” but if our heart isn’t right, it is defiled and detestable in God’s sight. If we give, whether in the offering plate or through our tuition payments to support Christian ministry, out a sense of compulsion, a sense of pride, a sense of anger because others aren’t doing their fair share, everything we put into that offering plate is defiled. It is the worst kind of “second best”!

What should we do? Read Haggai 1:12.

*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.*

The people heard and obeyed because they feared the Lord. Was this the “terror” kind of fear? Were they terrified of God? They had reason to be. Second place or second best is never what God is looking for in our lives.

The fear of the LORD that motivated them wasn’t a terror of God, but the “reverent awe” kind of fear, the amazement that God in his grace had called them to repentance and would still accept them in spite of all the second bests that they had offered to him.

Don’t we have even more reason to have this reverent awe kind of fear? We have a God who knew all our choices to give him the second best of our time and our offering, and he chose to give us his first fruits, his one and only Son who could bear our guilt. In Christ, his death and his resurrection we have a confidence that we are perfectly accepted in God’s sight, and that all we offer him is acceptable because it is offered through Christ. Yes, we have even more reason to have this “reverent awe” kind of fear!

If, in the fear of the Lord, we say put our trust in God and offering him a generous, first fruit offering, what does God promise?

## **2. The Blessings of a First Fruits Choice**

“Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: ‘I am with you,’ declares the LORD” (Haggai 1:13).

“I am with you!” This is what removes the fear of the future.

- What if I won’t have enough for health care when I am old? “I am with you!”
- What if I can’t pay for my kids’ college? “I am with you.”

The real bank account that can never run dry is this promise “I am with you.” I don’t know how my God will provide for me, but I know he will. The health challenges, the financial challenges, the family challenges that I face—I do not face them alone. Hear your dear Father in heaven speak into your heart: “I am with you!”

After a generation of giving God their second best, leaving the temple unfinished, in just three weeks, from the first to the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the month, something changed. They came and began to offer God their first fruits. They put their LORD first and their own homes and their own lives second. They began to build the temple again. How did that first fruits miracle take place? Look at Haggai 1:14-15.

<sup>14</sup> So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, <sup>15</sup> on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month (Haggai 1:14-15).

Do you have the power to choose to put God first in your life? As you think about your financial priorities and your time priorities, you may think, “I just can’t make a significant change in my life. I don’t have the will power.”

You are right! But the LORD, the Holy Spirit stirred up the spirit of God’s people in Haggai’s day. Is he any less powerful today? In your baptism you received the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Trust God’s power to enable you to put him first.

<sup>1</sup> In the second year of King Darius, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: <sup>2</sup> “Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, <sup>3</sup> ‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? <sup>4</sup> But now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ declares the LORD. ‘Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the LORD Almighty. <sup>5</sup> ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’

<sup>6</sup> “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. <sup>7</sup> I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. <sup>8</sup> ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty. <sup>9</sup> ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty.” (Haggai 2:1-9).

Who or what is “the Desired of All Nations”? It can be a reference to the Son of God or the peace that he gives. But that is what made this temple more glorious than Solomon’s earlier temple. It was in this temple that Jesus would walk. It was into this temple that he would come and give us peace. Today, the place where the Desired of All Nations is found is in God’s Church, we are his New Testament temple.

Read Haggai 2:15-19.

<sup>15</sup> “Now give careful thought to this from this day on—consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD’s temple. <sup>16</sup> When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. <sup>17</sup> I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not return to me,” declares the LORD. <sup>18</sup> ‘From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid. Give careful thought: <sup>19</sup> Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit.

“From this day on I will bless you.”

They laid the foundation 19 years earlier, but hadn’t built on it. As long as they lived a “second best” life, God was not going to bless them. But now, when they acted in faith, God promises, “From this day on I will bless you.”

Let’s lay the next stone on the foundation. Let’s not just hear these words, and say, “Yep, I should really put God first in all my financial decisions” and leave it there. Let’s actually lay down that first stone. So right now, take out the domino that we gave you as you came in. (We would have given you a brick, but they are really hard to get into your pocket.) Let this be the first brick to lay down as you seek to build God’s house with first fruit giving. What is the first thing that you need to do?

- Determine where you are in giving? What is the percentage you are giving?
- Take Financial Peace to get a handle on your finances so you control them not they control you?
- Start online giving so that it is automatically deducted like taxes?
- Make a commitment to give for the first time?
- If you are already a generous giver, perhaps is it to ask for a new spirit that finds joy in giving.

What is your first step? Take the domino home and lay it down where you will see it every day this week. It is a symbol, a commitment between you and your God, to turn away from second

best giving, to take the road less travelled, to choose to live a first-fruits-to-the-Lord kind of life. Remember:

- You have the Father's promise. "I am with you."
- You have the Spirit's power to give you strength to make that choice.
- You have the Desired of All Nations, the Son of God who gives you peace. Everything is alright. You are forgiven.

Let our offerings be first fruit gifts, the very best we can give, to sing praise to our God with our offerings even as we sing him praise with our lips.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **My Next Steps to a First Fruits Life**

- **Read a First Fruits Story:** Ezra 5 & 6 for the historical background. Then read Haggai (just two chapters) for God's blessings on a first fruits choice.
- **Pray about a First Fruits Plan:** On the weekend of October 27<sup>th</sup>, you will be invited to return a 10 week First Fruits plan. This week, examine where you have given God the "second best" in your life and offerings.
- **Seek help for a First Fruits Life:** Financial Peace University is a nine-week course designed to help you reach for that first-fruits approach to life. Mark interest on the Connection Card for the next session, the timing of which is yet to be determined.

## GroupWork

1. What training did you receive in your childhood to be generous? It could be a story about giving at church or generosity toward people in need.
2. Read Haggai 1:1-11.
  - a. The Israelites were giving God their “second best.” What evidence did Haggai bring to convict them of this sin?
  - b. What evidence is there evidence that Christians today are giving God their second best?
  - c. Haggai listed the consequences of second-best living for the Israelites. Do you see consequences of second-best living in our homes today?
3. Read Haggai 1:12-15
  - a. “The people feared the LORD.” Is that fear “terror” or “respect”? Explain.
  - b. “I am with you.” How does that promise help you to be more generous in your every day life and in your giving through church?
4. Read Haggai 2:1-9
  - a. The temple built during Haggai’s time would not be as magnificent as the one built by King Solomon almost 500 years earlier. But this temple would be glorious as the place where the “Desired of all Nations” would walk. Why is that a good title for Jesus?
  - b. “I am with you” (Haggai 2:4). Why do you think the LORD chose to repeat that promise about a month after the first time?
5. Haggai called upon God’s people to put him first. As you think about your financial offerings, what does it mean to you to put God first, that is, to chose to give him your first fruits?