

# WHEN LEFTOVERS JUST WON'T CUT IT

*Haggai: God Wants My Best, Not Whatever I Can Scrape Together at the End of the Day*

## PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Haggai 1:1-13

## SECONDARY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 6:31-33

## OBJECTIVES

1. THINK: Understand that God wants and deserves our best.
2. TODAY: Begin serving God by serving the needs of His church.
3. APPLY: Make God's priorities our priorities.

## OVERVIEW

This lesson looks at the words the prophet Haggai proclaimed to the nation of Judah. God confronts them because while His temple is in ruins they live in posh, decorated homes. God tells them their priorities are backwards and they need to give Him their best, not their leftovers.

## GETTING THINGS STARTED

Think about food.

What is your favorite food?

What is a meal you love so much that you would eat it all the time if you could?

Does your family have a recipe that makes you salivate? Like a pie Grandma makes or your aunt's baked beans or Uncle Joes' famous salsa? [Note: this would be a great time as a leader to bust out your family's favorite dessert to share with your small group.]

I've noticed that what goes into great food and a great recipe is not yesterday's leftovers. Even if you think that Thanksgiving leftovers are to die for, they didn't start that way. Nobody freezes the leftovers from last year's Thanksgiving and hopes people will be just as excited about them by serving them the following year. Instead, we prepare the best we can on those special days and enjoy the extras as long as they'll last.

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Now imagine inviting God to dinner. It's not that He's too holy to eat your leftovers, but would you really want to hand God half of yesterday's sandwich and some microwaved mashed potatoes? No, we would want to give God our best "made-from-scratch-secret-family-favorite-recipe".

However, it's easy to begin to slip into laziness with God. Instead of giving God our best hours of the day, we give him a few spare moments. Instead of donating a new TV to the church, we give them our old one we just replaced with a sweet flat screen. Instead of offering God the first and the best we have to give, we sometimes offer him the leftovers.

God wants more than our leftovers. He deserves more. He deserves our best.

## TEACHING GUIDE

Plain and simple, the nation of Judah has become consumed with stuff, specifically their own stuff. They work hard to insure they have food and water and nice homes, but they evidently are not concerned about the public temple. In our language today, it would be like people caring for their own homes, and neglecting the church campus. For students, it might mean caring that their own car is clean while ignoring the fact that the church van is covered in dust and grime and has a flat tire. In this case, Haggai says the people are living in nice personal spaces, but the place they come to worship God together is a dump. And it's not because God has not provided financially for them to solve the problem. It's that they are selfish and spend endless amounts on themselves.

As a group, read Haggai 1:1-13 and afterwards, share the following teaching points:

## LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

- **Regularly examine your priorities.**

Haggai confronts Judah because their priorities are out of whack. They are more concerned with themselves than they are with God. This attitude can subtly creep up on us if we are not careful. 2 Corinthians 13:5 challenges us to make spiritual self-examination a regular spiritual discipline. In Haggai 1:5 and again in verse 7, it says it is time to "give careful thought to your ways." Take the time to ask yourself how you're doing when listening to the voice of God. Consider how you're caring for the poor. Think of ways you can regularly evaluate your life.

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- **Be content with what you have.**

Selfishness grows when we think we deserve more. When we're not content with our house, friends, car, computer, or whatever, then we begin to justify spending more and more time and money on ourselves to try and fix the problem. Haggai confronts the nation of Israel because they keep their wages in "bags with holes." Enough is never enough. They always want more, and as a result, they never have anything to give to God or anyone else for that matter.

- **Care about the image and reputation of the church.**

Too often we think that it's not our job to pick up the trash at church. It's not our problem that the weeds are overgrown or that the walls need painting or that the chairs need to be stacked after youth group. We assume someone else will take care of it. The reality is it's no one's responsibility but our own. We cannot claim to be following God and then turn a blind eye to the needs of His church. Just like students understand that their reputation can be shaped by how they dress, so the church's reputation in a community can be shaped by how the building is viewed from the outside.

- **Decide to give God your best, not your leftovers.**

Notice the response of the nation in verse 12 to Haggai's warning. They repent of this behavior and decide that they will stop caring for themselves alone and start caring for the community of faith and the temple. They decide that instead of merely giving God their leftovers, they are going to give him their focused best effort. This results in God declaring in verse 13, "I am with you in this," a sharp contrast to the first 11 verses. We would be wise to do the same.

## DISCUSSING THE TEXT

- What physical thing in your life are you most discontent with? For example, if you could replace an item with a new one, what would it be?
- Do you think it's wrong to care about how your own house looks? Is this what Haggai is saying? Why or why not?
- How do you know if you worship your stuff more than God? What are some signs?

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- Read Matthew 6:31-33. How are the words that Jesus shares with the crowd on this mountainside similar to the words of Haggai?
- God uses Haggai to confront the people saying that they have busied themselves with their own concerns before God's. What do you think students are most concerned about in our world today? What do we busy ourselves doing?
- The chief concern of God in this text is His own Glory (vs. 8). How is that not just selfishness on God's part? How is that different than us seeking our own glory?

## APPLYING THE TEXT:

- EVALUTATION TIME: Create a list of 5 or 6 questions that are appropriate for your small group age level and such. Perhaps make one question for each of the 5 purpose areas if your church uses a PDYM model. Then give them some time alone to do what Haggai 1:5 says and "give careful thought to your ways." Leave enough space between questions for them to Journal their response. Then bring the group back together and see if anyone is willing to share a response or two. Regardless of their response, it would be good as a leader for you to have taken some time to do this in advance and to share some of your own thoughts to model this. Encourage students to continue this exercise on their own later.
- What do you think your church facility says to others about God? Do you think people show concern for your church property? Make a list of things that need to be done around the church or your youth group. Then decide if you—individually or as a group—could do something about those problems.

## FOR KEEPS (MEMORY VERSE)

*Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways"  
(Haggai 1:5 TNIV).*