

For those of you who may not know me, my name is Shea Sumlin, and I'm the campus pastor here. We're going to be in the book of Haggai. It's that tiny book in your Old Testament, a small prophet and clean pages that probably haven't ever been read. This prophetic book was written 2600 years ago, but I would argue with you that 2600 years later, it is just as applicable to where we're at, especially as a campus than any other time. So I hope this will be a redemptive time here these next few weeks just going through this and seeing what the Lord had to say to Israel 2600 years ago and what He would say to us today. I need to give you a little back story on the book before we jump in. It's a small book. It's only two chapters. There is a total of 38 verses and that's it. But there are four clear movements that are in this book. But you need to know the back story and history of where Israel was at this time for you to understand this book. Otherwise, we're going to jump into it and you're not going to know what they're talking about. Israel around 586 B.C. was already a divided kingdom. The southern portion of Israel had already been conquered by the Assyrians 100 or so years earlier. In 586, the northern kingdom, which was the only part of Israel that was left was conquered by the Babylonians. The nation of Israel had fallen into idolatry, they had ceased to worship God and as God had promised if they did so, they were enslaved by captors. So that's what happened. The Babylonians came in, captured the northern kingdom and hauled them off 900 miles away. That would be the equivalent of a foreign army coming into Flower Mound and taking the entire community of Flower Mound, every single person to the man, woman and child, and carting us off as far as the southern tip of Georgia and keeping us there for the next 50 years. So the northern kingdom gets shuffled off 900 miles away, they're under Babylonian rule and they can no longer worship their God freely like they did in Jerusalem. The temple that Solomon had built in all its splendor was destroyed and burned down. It was just lying in rubble. And then Israel was held captive. So fast forward about 50 years later, God intercedes. Enough is enough. In 539 B.C., the Persians come in and knock off the Babylonians. They are now in charge of this captive Israel, but the difference is the Persians are a little bit more liberal a little bit more tolerant of a plurality of worship. So Cyrus, the king of Persia at the time, issues a decree that all Jews can go back. So much like coming out Egypt, they're told that they can go back. So about 50,000 Jews take them up on the offer and take the 900 mile journey back to Jerusalem. But there was a large portion who stayed there, because some went, "We're doing fine. We've been her for 50 years. This is home now. The Persians aren't so bad. We can hang here." So they stayed, and you can read about them in the book of Esther. But the 50,000 who return go back and go to rebuild three different things. Both the prophets Haggai and Zechariah focus in on the rebuilding of the temple. Nehemiah focuses in on the rebuilding of the city and the walls that border the city. And then the book of Ezra focuses in on the rebuilding of the people. So you've got the temple, the city and the people being rebuilt all from different angles here in the Old Testament.

But particularly in the book of Haggai, he's going to speak to these people. Because as soon as they arrived in 536 B.C., they begin rebuilding the temple. They get the foundation rebuilt, but about that time, the Samaritans begin persecuting them. They are basically writing letters to Persia saying, "Listen, you don't want to let these people do this. If you allow them to rebuild this temple, they're going to worship their God. They believe their God is the only God, and the moment you allow them to do that, anarchy is going to ensue, they're going to rebel against Persia and you're going to have a mess on your hands. So if you're not going to stop them, we are." So these persecuting threats bother and scare this 50,000 person remnant that came back. So after they get the foundation poured, they're done and they quit. They take off and begin focusing on their own homes essentially. That goes on for fifteen years. After fifteen years, the temple is still in ruins. There's a foundation there, but with rubble everywhere. God's temple has not been restored. The people had been redeemed and released only to go back and focus on themselves. So fifteen years later, God sends

the prophet Haggai. Haggai comes in to give a word to the nation of Israel. He's going to give four messages in this very short book. The first message that we'll look at tonight is his focus on the need for kingdom priority. He's going to say, "God did not free you from the Babylonians and Persians to come back here just to focus on yourself and neglect His kingdom. So pour into His kingdom. That's why He saved you." And then in the second message, he's going to talk about the need for a plea to be forward thinking in this mission and not reverse thinking. You're going to see the nation of Israel look back and go, "This heap of rubble, it can't compare to what Solomon had. So I don't even feel motivation to go forward, because it's not as good as what I saw. My youth group days were much better than they are today. So I don't want to do anything else." So Haggai is going to speak to that. And then he's going to speak to what holiness looks like, that this is a holy mission you've been drawn to, and God has both called you and sanctified you to be holy. And then finally there's a message of hope, that what you're investing into here is not just some physical building that has no other use than to come and worship God, but there is One who is going to come through this building who is going to save people from their sins. And those are the four messages we're going to look at.

So let's pray and then we'll jump in. "Father, we just ask for Your blessing on our time together as we study this book. 2600 years ago, You gave this message to the nation of Israel. And Father, You have told us that Your Word is Your inspired Scripture and that all of it is useful today. So Father, I pray that You would use this message tonight, that You would use this plea from Yourself through Haggai to the Israelites to remind us of the kingdom priority that we have been called into. We ask for Your blessing. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

What you're going to get in Haggai 1:1 is some details here. You're going to get the date and you're going to get some key players. For most of the books in the Bible, we have approximates. We know they were written about this time. We know they were written over a 1500 year period. We can pinpoint most of the 66 books as to when they were written. But none is like Haggai in its explicit detail. We know exactly what day and what year these prophetic messages in Haggai occurred. He starts, "In the second year of Darius the king. . ." So Cyrus is gone and his son took over as ruler. Darius is now the ruler of Persia. "In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month. . ." So this is August 29, 520 B.C. We know exactly when this took place. ". . .the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah. . ." Zerubbabel is the political ruler here. He's the political leader of the nation. When they were captured by the Babylonians 50 years earlier, Zerubbabel was in line to be the next king of Israel. Had they not been captured and sent off into captivity, Zerubbabel would have been a king. But instead he went into captivity, now he comes back and he can't be king now because Persia is ruling. So he gets to be a governor. If you look at the book of Matthew 1 in the genealogy of Jesus, Zerubbabel is in that genealogy. He is one of the progenitors of the line of Christ. Through him, the Messiah would come. And now he's coming back to lead his people in this project of rebuilding the temple from a political leader standpoint. But also there is "Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest." So Joshua is the spiritual leader. He's the high priest that shepherds the nation here. He's the intercessor between them and God. So these are the people whom the word of the Lord comes to in verse 2. What you have in verse 2 is God's perspective of the excuse the people were making as to why they should not be building God's temple right now and why they have sat for fifteen years and have done nothing after God had called them to build it. This is their excuse. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD." That's their excuse. First of all, it's very interesting. What does God call His beloved nation? He doesn't call them "My people." He calls them "These people." That's a tip off that you've done something wrong with God, when He doesn't refer to you as His own. It's the same way when I go home after a long day at work. I'm expecting my wife and three beautiful girls to come to me and go, "Oh beloved one, we have missed you today. We're so thankful you are home in our presence." But instead, my wife sits there with my oldest daughter and goes, "Do you want to know what YOUR daughter just did?" It's the same type deal. When your name is not included, it's a tip off something's not right.

So God says, "These people, this is their excuse why they have not touched the temple in fifteen years, because they say the time has not yet come." Ezra tells us that, as the Samaritans got upset and were pleading with Persia to not let them do this and making threats, that the people became afraid. They felt, because the persecution was so tough, that evidently it must not be God's will that they should be doing this right now. "So I guess God's just telling us to take a pass and hang out for fifteen years and do nothing." So that was their excuse.

Verse 3, "Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet. . ." And notice what says to them. You can draw a circle around the word "time" in verse 2 and a circle around the word "time" in verse 4 and connect them, because this is God's sarcasm as to their excuse. "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins?" So God's going, "Let me get this straight. You say that the time hasn't come. It's too hard, it's too difficult and you can't commit to the Lord's work, but you do feel evidently that it's time for you to focus on your own home." The word that jumps out in this passage that gives context to the rest of this book is a word in verse 4 there. It's the word "paneled." If you were a Jewish reader reading this, this would have caught you off guard. Because the idea of a paneled house has to do with wood paneling, where you're taking cedar wood and using it to trick out your home. But if you've ever been to Israel, there's not a whole lot of trees over there. They are not a wood working community. That's why many believe that Jesus wasn't actually a wood working carpenter, because the word used there is "tektón," which means "stone builder." And if you go to Israel, the whole community is stone buildings. If you go into Jerusalem, it's a mandated law to this day that any new building built in Jerusalem has to be made out of the white sandstone rock that's Israel. So they're a stone working community. In order to get wood that you would panel your house with, you would have to go miles and miles into bordering countries of Phoenicia and Lebanon. And there you would have to spend a great deal of energy to cut down those trees, fashion them up, bring them back and then panel your house with them. So here is the Lord's point in this. He says, "You're telling Me it's not the right time to focus on My house, but you are spending a ton of energy, resources and time to go all the way up here and do this laborious work to bring back this stuff just so you can build up your own house, which will protect your own comfort and build up your own name for your kingdom. Meanwhile, My house over here, which is a work that is eternal, is lying in ruins, completely neglected because you have chosen to ignore it and focus on yourself. Something is not right with that."

Now let me stop right here and tell you what the problem isn't. The problem is not having wealth. The problem is not owning nice things. In fact, if you go through the Scriptures, the idea of wealth is talked about a lot, but truthfully money, wealth and resources in and of themselves are not condemned in Scripture. What is condemned is the love of those things. It doesn't say that money is the root of all evil. The love of money is the root of all evil. So the problem here is not wealth, and a lot of people want to make it the problem. We want to demonize wealth. To be spiritual men, we need to be walking around in sackcloth and eating honey and locusts off trees. That's not the Scripture's point of view. It's not condemning wealth. The problem is also not lack of time. It's not that the nation just didn't have enough time. They had the same 24 hours that everyone else did. They had the same fifteen years that everybody else did. The problem is also not laziness. I hear so many people who want to condemn this generation that's coming up now as so lazy. "All they want to do is sit around and play X-Box in front of the TV all the time." After 15 years of college ministry, this is not a lazy generation. It's actually a very disciplined generation. The problem is they're just disciplined in the wrong areas. I think what you see in here as you look at the nation of Israel here, the problem is not wealth, it's not time, it's not laziness. What the problem is is priority. And priority is always connected to the heart. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." He's saying, "You can give Me lip service all day long that you love Me, that I'm your God and I'm your King, but at the end of the day, if it doesn't show up in what you treasure the most, it's just that. It's just lip service." So the issue here and what God is relaying to these people is, "The problem isn't all these other things. It's that you care about yourself more than you care about My kingdom." God's saying, "I redeemed you. I brought you out of captivity. I gave you the freedom to go home. I saved you, not so that you would come back and focus on yourself, but that you would serve the very King who liberated you." And making the temple

the first priority, it's saying that, "God is our God and King. He is to be honored and worshiped." And up to this point the surrounding nations have considered God a laughing stock, as His temple lies in ruins. The temple was to be the first priority here. So God is saying, "Something is out of place here. Something is not right."

So here's what He does in verse 5. God calls sort of a time out and says through Haggai, "Let's do a test for just a moment. Let's just take these last fifteen years that you have spent pouring into your own kingdom and neglecting Mine and let's find out how successful you've been when you've neglected Me and pursued yourself." "Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little." He's saying, "You have done a lot of work in planting seeds and hoping that the crops will come up so you could have this big turnout in harvest, but really nothing is going to come forward. "You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill." So the both the grain and grape harvest have not come in yet. "You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes." So you have God going, "So let's see what's happened, Israel, for the last fifteen years. It's not time for My temple, but it's for your house. And as you have pursued you, you have expended a ton of energy, expecting this great return, but nothing has happened. So what has been going on? Why not? I want to jump ahead. Verses 9-11 tell us why nothing had come forth. "You looked for much, and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, I blew it away." He's saying, "You had great ambitions and wishes for what life would be like now that you're back, and you poured your life into it for fifteen years, only to have nothing come forth. Even the little that you did harvest, I blew it away." Theologically, God was behind this. Why? He answers it. "Why? declares the LORD of hosts. Because of my house that lies in ruins, while each of you busies himself with his own house." So God is saying here, "I'm the reason nothing has worked out for you. Because you have been absolutely and totally committed to yourself, I have been absolutely and totally committed to your failure." Now be careful of falling into the erroneous doctrine that, just because something bad happens to you, then you must be in sin. That's not true all the way universally through Scripture. Are there times where that's true? Absolutely. This is one of them. And I would argue that this is a national sin that took place in violation of Deuteronomy 28, the Mosaic covenant, which basically said, "The day that you forsake Me as a nation and you turn to idols, I will withhold the rains from your crops." And that's exactly what happened here. But if your young child gets cancer and you come up to a pastor and ask, "Is God mad at me?" that's a fallacy. Are there times when God disciplines those whom He loves? Absolutely. But is it also true biblically that we live in a fallen world where everything is broken from Genesis 3 on, to where disease and sickness happen and people suffer? Because according to Romans 8, is our own earth suffering and longing for the day of our redemption? Absolutely? Do things happen in that realm that are completely independent from my actions or perceived immoralities? You bet. So don't jump to that false doctrine. That's not true universally, but here there is truth there, because of the nation's sin. So God's promise in Deuteronomy 28 happened in verse 10 when He said, "Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce." Famine has taken place, and God has put it there to show the nation how fruitless they would be when they neglect Him and pursue themselves. So God says in verse 11, "And I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the ground brings forth, on man and beast, and on all their labors." God is essentially saying here, "You have pursued yourself, and the worst thing you can do with your life is be totally committed to it." It's quite the opposite, isn't it? God's economy is backwards from man's. In Mark 8, Jesus says, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" This is the radical call of discipleship, that you have been saved and redeemed, but not to come back and focus on yourself. That's not what salvation does. Salvation liberated you not to indulge in narcissism, but it liberated you to serve the King who freed you. That's the whole point of Romans 6. So God says to His people here, "Consider your ways. You have spent the past fifteen years pursuing self, and where has it led you? You're hungry, thirsty and naked and you're still famished.

I remember this becoming very applicable in my story with one of my brothers. For those of you who have older brothers, you know that God's purpose for them in your life was to torment you with the wrath of hell. I had a brother who was six years older than me, and I had a brother who was nine years older than me. So I was the beat-down, younger brother. My parent's had divorced when I was two and a half, and my mom was a single mom for a while, so she would be at work a lot of the time. And when she started dating again, she would go on a date, and my brothers would babysit me. And it was horrible. When the song Whip It by Devo came out, I had to hide, because my brothers would chase me with belts trying to whip it. My brothers loved to punish me. They had a fun game they would play with me from time to time called "Houdini." They would sit me in a chair, they would tie my arms and legs to the chair. Then they took every massive quilt my grandmother had made, and they would put them on me six deep. They would then kick the chair over where I fell on my back, lock the door and leave me there for the rest of the day until my mom got home. So I had to play Houdini to get out of this entrapment. We lived on a busy intersection in Richardson next to a train track and no fence around us. When the train would come and the cars would line up at the crossing and I was in the shower, they would take me out naked and lock me out on the front porch on the residential street. I don't even know what was going through the heads of some of these people who were waiting for the train to go who saw this naked kid out on the front porch. They just harassed me. They would take their senior rings with the big hump on one end, turn them upside down and just pop me on the head with their palms so the big part of the ring left a welt in my head. My mom would always just go, "Shea, that's just their way of telling you they love you." I was, "I don't want that kind of love. That's CPS kind of love." So that was my brothers. Now I didn't grow up in a Christian home. We didn't go to church and we didn't know the Lord. I had a friend who took me to church for the very first time in high school. The youth minister and some Sunday school teachers shared the gospel with me, and I put my faith in Christ and my life was changed. You can only imagine when I walked in the door where my mom, stepfather and two brothers are hanging out going, "I got saved tonight!" They just looked at me like I was insane. One of my brothers scoffed at me and called me an idiot. It was just this instant sense that this was going to be a hard road.

As I mentioned before, my parent's were divorced. My dad left with another woman, and we moved from Chicago back to Texas where my mom was from. And as big as our age gap was and difference in spirituality was, the one thing we had deeply in common growing up was a staunch commitment that if we were granted the opportunity to get married one day, we would never leave our wives, we would never cheat on our wives and we would never break up the home. Because we knew what that was like to go through that. When I was in college at the University of North Texas, I get a phone call from my mom, who is in tears. She just said, "You need to know that your oldest brother and his wife are splitting up." They had a little boy and a little girl, and so I thought, "Oh no. What happened?" She had an affair and he's done with her. He called me and wants me to help him get the best lawyer money can buy, because he wants the kids. I just remember sitting there weeping, going, "No Lord, not again." And a couple weeks later, I get a phone call from my brother. We didn't talk a whole lot. It was mainly just thumps on the head and locking me outside naked. That was about it. He calls me in deep humility and asks me a question that chills me to this day. He says, "Shea, I don't want to lose my family. I don't want to lose my kids, and I don't want to lose my wife over this. What can your God do to save my marriage?" I'm 20 years old, just a handful of years past puberty. I don't know a whole lot about marriage at this point. He's like, "Can you drive down here and talk with the both of us and walk us through about what your God can do to fix this?" So I jump in my truck and head down to Houston. Half of the time, I'm curled up in the fetal position thinking, "There's no way." The other half of the time, I'm trying to recount the five Navigator's memory verses that I had memorized at that time. So I get there and walk into the room. Because of his life, my brother was absolutely committed to his life. He got a great job at Compaq, worked his way up to a high up executive, making tons of money, had a huge house, two kids, three car garage and a pool. So I go into this massive house and he's in one corner of the room and his wife is in another corner, completely cold to each other. Sitting on the couch is my dad and the woman he had left with when we were younger. They were all looking at me, wanting to know, "What can your God do to fix this?" So I start pleading with him, and the only thing that made absolute sense to me was this. I said, "David and Terry, Jesus shared

a story in Scripture about two different people who both built houses. One built a house on a very sandy foundation, with no anchor and no roots. And when the storm came, it devastated it. The other man built his house on a solid rock, tethered and anchored in deep. And when the storm came, it remained." I said, "I love you, but for your entire life you have neglected every attempt that God has pursued you out of His love to follow Him, and instead you followed your own way. You built up this phenomenal castle that would fulfill every aspect of the American Dream, and yet the storm came. And has devastated it now. My advice to you as a humbler 20 year old would be to pursue Jesus. Anchor yourself in to the rock. I promise you, there will be other storms to come. Putting your faith in Christ doesn't mean storms aren't going to come. They're going to come, but you'll be sown into the rock. And Christ will reframe everything for you. He loves you. He's been pursuing you since before you were born. And right now, I believe louder than ever He is wooing you to Himself if you would just surrender." By the end of our time, their chairs had scooted together and they were sitting closer to each other right there and tears are coming down. That week, I watched my brother put his faith in Jesus Christ. I watched his wife put her faith in Jesus Christ. I'm not saying it was smooth, nice and romantic. It was a hard process. It still is. But over that next year, I watched their marriage reconcile, and now my brother has gone absolutely insane because he's a pastor down in Houston now. His wife and he spend their days now counseling other couples who are going through adultery and showing them that there is redemptive hope in Jesus Christ, who is a God of second first times, a God who can make old things and can take the broken pieces of our world and put them back together. And that's what they do. It's the clearest picture I have seen other than myself of someone who pursued recklessly devotion to their own life at the expense of God and saw the devastation from it.

And as you see God speaking now to Israel, the question becomes this. What's the answer? What do you do when you're in that situation? What do you do when you find yourself untethered from the Lord and empty, hungry and famished? What do you do? The answer is in verse 8. This is what God tells the nation of Israel. "Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified." In other words, "I want you to go to the same place you used to go to supply the goods for your own kingdom, I want you to take the same energy to go get the same resources and the same offering that you took for your own life and I want you to take it back and pour it into My house, so that I may take pleasure in it. Because when you were pursuing your own self, I was not pleased with what you were doing. Instead of building into your own kingdom, take the same energy and resources that you've had and build into Mine. And when you do so, My pleasure will be felt." So this is an act of repentance. "Seek first My kingdom. All the other stuff I will take care of. But seek first Me."

So here's the question. What's the response of the people? What did they do? What would you do in this moment? Verse 12, "Then Zerubbabel the 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," Obedience settled in. They heeded the word of the Lord. But it want you to notice what their first act of obedience was. "[They] obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD." The first act of repentance has nothing to do with your hands. It has everything to do with your heart. It's not as if the people heard that message and went, "All right boys, let's grab a shovel. Let's go. Let's head on out, get some cedar wood and bring it back." That's not what they did. Their first act of obedience was a fear of the Lord. There was a reverence. Remember the issue of idolatry? It's not wealth, it's not time, it's not discipline; it's a heart issue. So their first act of obedience was to repent from the heart. And as soon as that happened, notice how God responds. The moment that their heart is now broken, verse 13 says, "Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, "I am with you, declares the LORD." The moment your heart turns in its affections for the Lord, you instantly have the promise from God that He is with you. That's what I love about the great commission. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always,

to the end of the age." "As you go in obedience, as your heart is with Me, you have the assurance of My presence with you. I will never leave you or forsake you."

And then notice what happens next in verse 14. Once the heart is secured, now the hands follow. "And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. And they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God." True heart change should always lead to the hands that follow. And they go and take the energy they were spending towards their own kingdom and they turn around and now use it to pour into the Lord. And it's all happening "on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king." Twenty four days after Haggai first came, God has now seen His people transformed.

So why would I share this book with you? Why would I share this first message here? Do we have something, as the church, that we're building into as well? The answer is yes. It's not a physical building. The Lord no longer dwells in a house made of human hands. It is a spiritual one. And He has saved us and has now put us on a mission to go herald the news of Jesus Christ, to build up and edify His church. That's the work that we've been called to in the time we have left on this earth. And here's the beauty of this. If you stop and listen to just the whole story here in chapter 1, do you see the gospel? See if this sounds familiar. The nation of Israel is commanded to pursue God and there would be peace in the land. Instead they forsook that and pursued themselves, and God then sends in the Babylonians to enslave them. But at the right time, He redeems them, brings them out and frees them in that salvation, not so that they would return and pour into their own lives, but that they would go and give it away and serve the King who had liberated them. That's the gospel. That's the same thing that happened to you and me. You and I rejected God and we exchanged the truth for a lie (Romans 1). We were judged and enslaved to the captivity of our own sin, of the prince of the power of the air. And at the right time, Jesus Christ's blood was offered and He was sacrificed on our behalf and in our place, and we have now been reconciled to God in faith through Christ. We have been redeemed from that captivity. And we have been sent out into the world now, not to go pursue a kingdom of our own self, but to pursue His. That's why we're here. Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 6. "In the short amount of time we have left on this planet, don't spend it storing up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust can destroy and thieves can break in and steal. But spend your time investing in and storing up treasures in heaven where moth and rust can't even touch and thieves can never get.

That's what we've been saved into. And I would just simply plead with you here. We live in the pinnacle of suburban affluence around us. And is there not a temptation on a given day to take the salvation that we've received and allow our culture to influence us in a way that we look more like them than we look like Christ. There is a temptation in that moment to succumb to those pressures, neglect the mission we've been saved into and pursue the mission of self and narcissism. And in the heart of Haggai here, I would plead with you to let us be a light in this community around us. Let us forsake the vain pursuits of self that so easily entangle us. And let's pursue His kingdom first, trusting Him in the radical call of discipleship and obedience so that we might penetrate this culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ. I'm not arguing for you to become poor. I'm arguing for you to use the resources, the time, the treasures and the talents that God has given you and has given us as a church for His redemptive purposes.

Would you pray with me to that end? "Our Father, we bless Your name. We thank You that You are a redeemer. Though we were once enslaved, once in captivity of our own sin, subject to the ruler of this world, Lord, You have broken those chains. And through Jesus Christ, You have redeemed us. You have pulled us from the mire of our own sin, the pit of iniquity that we were in bondage to and You have set us now on firm ground, anchored in Your and Your Word. You have given us a mission, as Jesus prayed in John 17, 'As [the Father] sent me into the world, so I have sent [you] into the world.' Father, I recognize that on any given day, our hearts are still deceitful and the gravitational pull of sin can still pull us towards selfishness, narcissism and the building up of our own kingdom. And I pray, Lord, that You would wean us from

those idols, that You would tether us to You and Your Word, that we would spend these days, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, focused on Your kingdom, seeking to make every aspect of the live we have left an offering to You and that lives might be transformed. Would You do that? Would You break our hearts? We love You, God. We thank You for this in Jesus' name. Amen."

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