

There are certain things in life that you want to make sure you put careful thought into. You put careful thought into buying a home. You put careful thought into choosing a college or career. In God’s Word today, the LORD tells us to put careful thought into our use of material possessions. Today God says,

“Give Careful Thought to Your Ways”

- I. Consider the Consequences of Putting Yourself First
- II. Consider the Consequences of Putting God First

First consider the consequences of putting yourself first in your use of resources. The people of Israel were putting themselves first. 70 years earlier, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had knocked down the temple and had taken the Israelites into captivity in Babylon. 70 years later, the Israelites returned to Jerusalem and the temple was in ruins. At first they started to rebuild the Temple. They built an altar and laid the foundation for the Temple. But then they stopped the work. And the rest of the temple remained in ruins for almost 15 years.

Why did it remain unbuilt for so long? Because the Israelites became more interested in their own things than in building the house of the Lord. They said, **“The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.” (1:2)** But the LORD pointed out that they had found the time and resources to build nice houses for themselves. The LORD said to them, **“Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” (Haggai 1:3)** The fact that the LORD emphasizes that these were *paneled* houses indicates that this paneling was a luxury (1 Kings 6:9, 7:3, 7; Jeremiah 22:14).¹ The other times in the Bible when this word is used it refers to either Solomon’s temple or a king’s palace. One commentator observed that yesterday’s luxury had become today’s necessity.² Does that ever happen to us? Do we ever think that we need something, when in reality it’s a luxury, not a necessity? It’s not wrong to have luxuries, but when we spend large amounts of money on luxuries but at the same time fail to give a good sized offering to the Lord, we are doing the same thing that they were doing when they spent money on paneled houses but failed to rebuild the temple of the Lord.

In response the Lord tells them: **“Give careful thought to your ways” (1:5).** In our lesson he says this twice: **“Give careful thoughtful thought to your ways.” (1:5, 7)** He wanted them to consider what they had been doing and how it had been working out for them. He wanted them to consider the consequences of putting themselves first. One consequence of them putting themselves first was that God had withheld his blessings. They planted lots of seed, but their harvests were small. It says, **“You have planted much, but harvested little” (1:6).** God said that this was a direct consequence of them leaving his house in ruins while they lived in luxury. **““You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. ... Why?” declares the LORD Almighty. ‘Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house.’” (1:9)** This does not mean that every time there is a drought or every time you experience financial difficulty, it is a result of a specific sin. But it does mean that if we do not use the resources God gives the way he intended, God might respond by taking those resources away.

Another consequence of putting themselves first is that they were not completely satisfied with the resources which they did have. **“You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm” (1:6).** Isn’t it interesting that even though we Americans are the most wealthy

¹ References are from the Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon and various commentaries.

² J. Motyer, *Haggai* in *The Minor Prophets*, ed. Thomas Mckomisky, Grand Rapids: Baker.

nation in the world, we're not the most happy people in the world. When we put ourselves first in our use of resources, we are left with a sense of emptiness.

Still another consequence of them putting themselves first is that all of money went away very quickly. It says, **"You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it" (1:6)**. I remember seeing a WELLS FARGO commercial a few years ago. It was advertising a feature of their website that shows you where you spend your money. The commercial showed a customer who realized that he was spending money every month on a gym membership he never used and music streaming service he never listened to. That's an example of putting your money into a purse with holes in it. When we try to get our happiness from stuff, we end up buying more and more stuff and then our paycheck is gone very quickly. **"You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it" (1:6)**.

When we look at the consequences of putting ourselves first, we realize that putting ourselves first leaves us feeling empty. How are we going to find satisfaction in a materialistic world that leaves us feeling empty? Well, one time Jesus told a story about a man who wasted his possessions. And after he had spent everything there was a famine in that country and he began to be in need. So much need that he had to get a job feeding pigs. But then he went back to his father. And his father ran to him and threw his arms around him and kissed him. So in a materialistic world that leaves you feeling empty, the way to be satisfied is to be filled up with God's love, a love that sent his Son to empty his life on the cross for us. Jesus emptied himself on the cross so that we could be filled up and have true satisfaction both now and forever.

Now that we have considered the consequences of putting ourselves first, let's consider the consequences of putting God first. The people responded to the preaching of Haggai. They recognized that God was talking to them through Haggai. They **"obeyed the voice of the LORD their God." (1:12)** They repented of putting themselves first. **"The people feared the LORD" (1:12)**. God responded to their repentance by giving them a promise. He said, **"I am with you." (1:13)** And this promise stirred up their hearts to rebuild the temple. **"So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the governor of Judah and the spirit of Joshua 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" (Haggai 1:15)**. They responded to the preaching of Haggai by putting God first and rebuilding the Temple.

How are we going to respond to this word from God? For the next three Sundays in worship we are going to be talking about stewardship. We are going to be encouraging you to prayerfully consider putting God first by giving 10% of your income to the Lord in your offerings. The stewardship program is called 10 for 10. The program asks each of us to consider giving 10% of our weekly income for 10 weeks. 10% for 10 weeks. 10 for 10. The practice of giving 10% of your income to the Lord is called tithing. In the Old Testament, God commanded that his people give 10% of their income. It was one of God's Old Testament laws. In the New Testament we have freedom. Christ has freed us from the Old Testament law by fulfilling it. So we are no longer bound by the tithe as a matter of law. But it is still God's will that we give generous offerings. And 10% is a good goal for us to strive for in freedom and inspired by grace. So please prayerfully consider giving 10% of your weekly income in offerings for ten weeks.

What will be the consequences of putting God first by giving ten percent of your income? The consequences will not be that your needs are not met. Jesus said, **"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)** We can trust that God is going to take care of us.

One consequence of putting God first *will* be that our heavenly Father is pleased. It says, **"Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it." (1:8)** Our Father is

pleased with gifts given out of love for him. Children love to please their father. Our Father in heaven smiles in gifts given out of thankfulness.

Another consequence of putting God first is that it brings glory to God. It says, **“Build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored.” (1:8)** God would be glorified by the temple that the Israelites were building. God would be worshiped there. His name would be proclaimed there. And God would be glorified by that temple in a special way because someday the Messiah would come to the temple that the Israelites were building. You see if you keep reading in the book of Haggai, you’ll find that once the new temple started to take shape some of the Israelites were disappointed. They were doing their best. But they were disappointed because the temple just didn’t look as glorious as the one King Solomon had built. But God said in Haggai chapter 2, **“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house” (Haggai 2:9).** Why would the glory of this temple be greater? It did not look as glorious as Solomon’s temple. But the glory of this temple would be greater because some day Jesus would come there. They were building the temple that Jesus would sit in as a twelve year old boy. They were building the temple that Jesus would cleanse when he drove out the money changers. They were building the temple that Jesus himself would teach in. Why are your church offerings important? Your church offerings are important because they help bring Jesus to people. And when Jesus is brought to people, people are saved and God is glorified.

There are a lot of things that are worthy of careful thought. Give careful thought to your use of material resources. Consider the harmful consequences of putting yourself first. Putting yourself first leaves you empty. But also consider the blessed consequences of putting God first. Putting God first is satisfying and fulfilling. Putting God first brings Jesus to people and gives God glory. Give careful thought to your ways. Consider the harmful consequences of putting yourself first. And consider the blessed consequences of putting God first. Amen.