

It's Time to Consider Our Priorities

It's Time #1 - Pastor Gary Combs - January 12, 2025 - Haggai 1:1-6

INTRO: Good morning church! I'm happy to be back from my annual study break. I'm thankful for a church that generously allows me to get away to study and prepare our annual sermon calendar and to seek God's vision for our church! I'm also thankful for our teaching team! Thank you Mike Laramée and Adam Purvis for preaching in my absence. It's a blessing to know that our preaching ministry doesn't miss a beat when I take a break.

We're starting a new series today called "It's Time!" We're going through the book of Haggai. Our title comes from...

Haggai 1:2; 2:4-5 (ESV) "These people say the **time** has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord... Yet now **be strong... Work**, for I am with you, declares the Lord... My Spirit remains in your midst. **Fear not.**"

In 586 B.C., the armies of Babylon had destroyed the temple in Jerusalem—God's house, the symbol of his presence with them. In 538 B.C. King Cyrus of Persia overthrew Babylon and decreed that the Jewish exiles could return to their beloved city and rebuild the temple. So they traveled to Jerusalem and began the work. But due to opposition and confused priorities, nearly 18 years had passed and the work was still at a standstill (Ezra 4:4-5).

Then a voice was heard, the Lord spoke through the prophet Haggai calling God's people to consider their priorities. They were saying it wasn't time to rebuild God's house, but God disagreed. God spoke through Haggai telling His people, **"It's Time to Be Strong, Do the Work, and to Be Fearless!"**

Although Haggai is a small book, it is filled with challenge and promise, reminding us of God's claim on our lives and on our priorities. God wants first place in our lives!

Need: But what about the pressures, demands, expectations, and tasks that push in from all sides and assault our schedules? Do this! Be there! Finish that! Respond to that email! Answer that text! It seems as though everyone wants something from us—family, friends, employers, school, church, children's sports and activities... Soon there is little left to give, as we run out of energy and time.

We find ourselves rushing through life, attending to the necessary, the immediate, and the urgent. The important is all too often left in the dust. Our real problem is not the volume of demands or lack of scheduling skills, but our priorities—what is truly important to us?

Our values and priorities are reflected in how we use our resources—our time, our talent, and our treasure—our money. Often our actions belie our words. We say God is number one, but then we relegate him to a lesser number on our "to do" lists.

That's what the Jewish exiles struggled with... they got their priorities out of order. They began to tell themselves they didn't have time for God and God's Kingdom. "Maybe later." They said. But God said, "No. It's time now."

Trans: So we're going to be looking at what God wants to say to us in our time through His word to Haggai. It's a 8-week sermon series, but it's also the launch of our 3-year generosity initiative called **"It's Time."**

What is it? IT'S TIME is a three-year generosity initiative to fund our vision to strengthen our community engagement, elevate our ministry capacity, and fearlessly lay the foundation for our future growth. Through IT'S TIME, God is calling us to partner with Him by investing ourselves and our resources in greater levels of commitment, in order to saturate Rocky Mount and Wilson and the surrounding areas of Eastern North Carolina with the gospel of Jesus Christ! **It's time to hear God's call to seek His Kingdom first!**

Did you get your IT'S TIME Journey Guide? Hold it up. Over the next weeks we're inviting you to go on a spiritual journey together and this is your journey guide. You'll want it to take sermon notes in every Sunday, you'll want it for your daily devotions and for your weekly CG gatherings. So go ahead and write your name in it.



What's in the IT Journey Guide? (Call out the tabs while holding up the book) Look at the first photo. That's our Thanksgiving Praise Service on November 24, 2024. That's our church. People from both campuses. That's our church because the church is not the steeple...it's the people! So for us to put God's kingdom first doesn't mean rebuilding a temple. It means It's Time to be strong, do the work, and to be fearless in being and growing as God's church!



OUR GOAL is 100% engagement of our members and attenders go on this IT spiritual journey together!

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What does it look like for you to commit to this spiritual journey with us?

- Commit to attend every Sunday, bringing your It's Time Journey Guide to take sermon notes.
- Commit to do the 6-week devotional (Monday through Friday starting Jan. 13th through Feb. 21st).
- Commit to attend a weekly Community Group gathering to discuss our It's Time vision.
- Commit to pray our It's Time prayer: "Lord, what do you want to do in and through me?"
- Commit to respond to God's leading on **Commitment Sunday, February 16th**, and by faith to make a sacrificial, financial commitment over the next 3-years that is over and above your current giving.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Our church has reached yet another decisive moment in its history. We believe It's Time to strengthen our community engagement, elevate our ministries and staff capacity, and fearlessly lay the foundation for our future growth in Wilson and in Rocky Mount.

IT'S TIME TO . . .

. . . BE STRONG

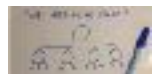
God has called us to saturate our region with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In order to accomplish this goal, we must continually reintroduce ourselves to our communities. Why? Because new people are coming to our region as never before. When you combine the strong economic and population growth our region is experiencing, we must be strong in faith and grow in generosity to reach all the new people coming our way. This 3-year generosity initiative will strengthen our community engagement for this purpose.



New people moving to a new town are often the most open to life change and having a conversation about the gospel. Therefore, it's easy to see that it's time for us to resource and pursue this goal with intensity. We plan to spend the first portion of our generosity initiative on this core priority.

. . . DO THE WORK

This generosity initiative will elevate our ministry capacity. As we strengthen our community engagement and as our region grows, we will see more people coming to Eastgate. This means that we will need to work at sharpening and enhancing our current ministries. It also means that we will need to enlarge our ministry capacity through bringing on additional staff. We believe that we need to add at least two additional pastoral staff to our team, one in Rocky Mount and one in Wilson, in order to continue growing. This initiative will help fund these two positions until the church is able to cover it through the general fund. It is critical that we care for the increasing number of people we reach with adequate staffing and ministry resources at both campuses.



. . . BE FEARLESS

Finally, through this initiative we will fearlessly lay a foundation for future growth. We will need adequate space for those we reach at both campuses. In Wilson, we've already made room for more by completing Phase Two of our master plan. But we need to lay the groundwork for future expansion by setting aside a portion of the funds we raise for beginning Phase Three when the time comes.

In Rocky Mount, we believe the Lord has given us a miraculous opportunity! A church property that would cost us \$5 million to build has become available. Because of our shared mission to reach Rocky Mount with the Gospel, we can purchase it for \$1.2 million. We plan to use a combination of our equity and monies committed in this generosity initiative to obtain a mortgage in order to make the purchase.



In order to accomplish these three goals, we intend to raise \$1.5 million through a 3-year generosity initiative that will provide a number of benefits to our church family and our community. Our primary goal during this initiative is 100% engagement of our members to take this journey of faith together. So one of the really important benefits will be that we grow in the spiritual discipline of generosity.

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Trans: Most importantly, this initiative will prioritize our goal to reach every man, woman, and child in our cities and region, so they have repeated opportunities to see, hear, and respond to the gospel. We believe God is tell us that it's time get our priorities right and to be strong, do the work, and fearlessly reach our region for Jesus!

BODY: In Haggai chapter 1:1-6, the prophet challenged the Jews who had returned from Babylonian exile to consider whether they were giving God and His house priority. We can consider whether we're giving God and His Kingdom priority. Why should we consider whether we're giving God and His Kingdom priority. The text gives **three reasons** why we should consider giving God and His Kingdom priority.

Read text: Haggai 1:1-6 (ESV) ¹ In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: ² "Thus says the Lord of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord." ³ Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

WHY CONSIDER GIVING GOD AND HIS KINGDOM PRIORITY?

1. Because God calls us to seek His Kingdom first.

EXP: (1-2) Notice that the Lord had Haggai note the time/date, the leaders and what the people were saying. "These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD" (2).

"Second year...sixth month...first day" (1) - One of the more accurate datings of any OT writing. This word comes to the people in 520 B.C. on the 1st day of the month of Elul (August-September).

"Darius the king" (1) - Darius the Great of Persia. He reigned 522-486 B.C. He continued the benevolent policies that had characterized the reign of Cyrus who issued the original order for the rebuilding of the Temple and the return of the Jewish captives to Jerusalem. (*Coffman's Commentaries on the Bible*)

"Haggai the prophet" (1) - We know nothing of the parentage of Haggai. He was probably born in Babylon during the captivity, and appears to have been the first prophet sent to the Jews after their return.

"By the hand of Haggai" (1, 2x) - God does almost everything which He does for a person through the hands of people. He commits His words and works for people into the hands of human beings as His stewards, to dispense faithfully to His household. (*Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible*)

"Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel" (1) - His name means, "sown in Babylon." The heir to David's throne, but now "governor of Judah" under King Darius.

"Joshua the son of Jehozadak" (1) - the high priest. Also born in Babylon.

"The time has not yet come" (2) (עַתָּבָא, *ēṭ bô*) - time, season, occurrence, occasion.

"House of the LORD" (2; 3x) (בַּיִת, *bayit*) - Lit., "house of Yahweh." The Temple.

ARG: Jesus give us God's clear call to put His kingdom first in our priorities.

Matthew 6:33 (ESV) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

ILL: As I said earlier, I've just returned from my annual study break. One of the things I do is evaluate my priorities and our church's priorities. I look at my time, talent, and treasure priorities. Am I putting God first?

APP: **It's time to be strong in putting God first!** In your IT Journey Guides you'll see a tab "6-week Devotional." We want everyone who says "Yes" to this spiritual journey together to read, journal and pray M-F, 5 days a week, starting tomorrow. Giving God the first part of every day, giving Him your time, is a great way to seek His kingdom first. January is also a great time to evaluate your generosity towards God and His kingdom. Are you tithing? Are you serving. We're called to make disciples of Jesus who have a heart for God, heart for each other, and heart for our world. Are you putting the pursuit of being a disciple of Jesus first in your life?

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2. Because God works through those who put His Kingdom first.

EXP: (3-4) The Lord pointed out that although they didn't think it time to build His house, they did think it time to build their own paneled houses. God's kingdom awaits our service. He chooses to work through us as His kingdom laborers. For we are the body of Christ. We are His hands and feet, called to do His work.

"A time for you yourselves" (4) (לָכֵן) - God is really asking as the KJV says, "Is it time for you?" Is it your time? You say you need a little "me" time while God's house is in ruins.

"Dwell in your paneled houses" (4) (פָּנִים, *sāpān*) - "The paneled houses described probably had walls covered with cedar wood. Such was a sign of prosperity in a land where wood was scarce. The people were spending freely on their own homes while neglecting the rebuilding of the temple." — *ESV Study Bible*

ARG: **Jesus told His disciples to pray for workers to work in the Kingdom harvest.**

Matthew 9:37-38 (ESV) Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

ILL: I remember the early days of our church when Robin and I prayed this prayer. We're praying it again now!

APP: **It's time to do the work of putting God first!** He wants more workers! People who are ready to serve and do kingdom work. I hope we see some of our young people answer the call to full time Christian ministry. We're all called to be ministers, but I'd love to see some of our future pastors come up from our young people.

3. Because God satisfies those who put His Kingdom first.

EXP: (5-6) God invites His people to "consider" their ways, their priorities. Has putting yourselves first led to your fulfillment, to your satisfaction and happiness? It hasn't has it?

"Consider your ways" (5) (שׁוּם, *śûm*) - "Reflect seriously...whether it is consistent with the reason of things, or whether you have even promoted your own happiness by it..." (*Benson Commentary*)

"Sown much but harvested little" (6) - they've worked hard on their homes and in their fields, but not at all on God's house. God is not accusing them of laziness, but of selfishness.

"Eat but never enough" (6) (שָׂבֵעָה, *śāb'â*) - satisfaction, satiety, one's fill; you can't get full.

"Drink but never have your fill" (6) (שָׂכַר, *śākār*) - to become drunk. Not making you happy.

"Clothe yourselves but no one is warm" (6) - despite having fine clothes you can't get warm.

"Earn wages ... into a bag with holes" (6) - this might be one of the most accurate illustrations for the modern reader. Many of us feel like our pockets have holes, like our bank accounts have a leak.

ARG: **Putting God first, rather than the pursuit of riches, leads to that which is "truly life."**

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (ESV) ¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

ILL: The most joyful people I know are also the most generous. I remember my Uncle Gene. He was a contractor. He built houses and several churches. He probably gave away more money than most of us have ever made. He and my aunt Jerry took us in after my dad died. Even after I was grown and married, he'd shake hands with me and there'd be a \$50 or \$100 bill in his hand. He was a giver. He was always generous and always joking and laughing. Do you know someone like that?

APP: **It's time to be fearless in our generosity**, knowing that only God truly satisfies. Misers are miserable. But givers are glad. True satisfaction and fulfillment come from putting God's kingdom first.

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CONCLUSION: Speaking of giving, the greatest giver and the source of greatest joy is Jesus! For He gave His life on the cross, paying our sin debt, and rose again on the third day, overcoming sin, death, and the grave. And He lives today, calling us to Himself to be citizens of His Kingdom with Him as our King.

Have you bowed the knee of your heart to Him?

Have you decided to put Him and His Kingdom first, giving Him first priority in your life?

Because...

- 1) God calls you to seek His Kingdom first.
- 2) God works through you when you put Him first.
- 3) God satisfies those who put His Kingdom first.

Will you give God and His Kingdom first priority in your life today?

Let's pray.

Remember to pray:

"Lord, what do you want to do in and through me?"