

The young girl walked up to her parents and said, "I'm moving out." Stunned the parents looked at their thirteen year old. Then mom responded calmly. "Fine, can I help you pack? Where do you think you're heading?" "I'm not sure yet, maybe a friend's house." "Oh, but your friend's parents can't support you for very long. You'll need your own food, clothes, and really your own place to live." The girl's confidence started to sink. "Plus because you don't have a job or a car to drive to one it's going to be tough supporting yourself." "Yeah, I didn't think of that," the girl said meekly. Finally both parents asked, "Did you want more time to think about your decision?" Nodding, the young girl walked back to her room.

Maybe you never announced you were running away from home without thinking it all the way through. But the foolishness of a thirteen year old is no different than our foolishness. We make rash decisions in the heat of the moment. We commit ourselves to things we can't possibly hope to accomplish. We don't think through all the consequences of our actions. We hurt people's feelings, we leave work unfinished, and we exhaust ourselves trying.

Back in August of 520 BC the prophet Haggai was being used by God to speak to the Israelites who had returned from exile in Babylon. They were acting foolish and it was time for God to bring them back. Listen to see if Haggai's words don't do something to call you back from your foolishness...

**Give careful thought to your ways  
The more you have the more you want  
The more you have of God the more he gives**

The Israelites had been held in captivity in Babylon for 70 years. When they returned their homeland was in ruins. Homes, roads, businesses all need to be rebuilt. Even the temple was destroyed. The Israelites picked the easy and safe stuff to do first. Building their homes first meant protection and a place to come back to. It meant a place to raise kids, meet friends, and a place to make their own. But spending so much time on their own homes caused them to neglect God's house. **"These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.'"** So God came with a question. **"Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"** The more time the Israelites spent on caring for their homes the less time they cared about God.

Design experts might tell you that wood paneling went out of style a long time ago. If your home has it you probably love it though, I know my parents do. During Israel's time wood paneling was only for royalty. But God wasn't critiquing their décor or yours. He wasn't saying that you can't have nice things or a nice home. He is asking you to **"give careful thought to your ways."** Where's your heart? Do we spend more time on ourselves than God? Each day you eat, drink, shop, and earn. But it's never enough. You've spent your time on yourself. **"You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little."** Spending all that time and money and effort on yourself merely made you want more. God proves it's true, the more we have the more we want.

God gave the Israelites a better way. **"Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored."** They had tried a self centered approach. Now God was inviting them to instead focus on him. Basically they were to do things for God, put him first instead of themselves, and see what happens.

Instead of yourself, put God first. Don't worry or work for more, God's promise leads us to see and take the other way. God's promise is doing his will first pleases him. Time spent focusing on God brings him glory. Spending time in his Word always brings him glory and builds our faith. Doing his work highlights God's goodness. This promise leads us to Jesus. He alone puts priorities back into proper alignment. Instead of always wanting more, Christians by faith listen to God and work for him. Laboring among family might not get you awards. But it does do what God asks of you. Sharing your faith won't always get noticed. But it does bring glory to God whose name we share. **"Give careful thought to your ways"** by avoiding the always wanting more trap and following God's ways which pleases him as promised.

My wife doesn't have that many purses. In fact I was the one that told her to go and get a new one. Not because I wanted to give her an excuse to go shopping. It was because every time she picked it up something was falling out the bottom through a huge hole. Of course she loved the purse and couldn't get rid of it. But she did stop using it before anything important fell out. That's a real world **"purse with holes in it."** No matter what she put in she would always need more. With God that isn't a problem. The more we fill ourselves up with the things of God we won't find we constantly need more. Rather the more of God we have the more he gives.

Children like to think they're smarter than their parents. They'll listen, but then sin second guesses and doesn't do it. This was not the trouble with the children of Israel this time. **"Then Zerubbabel, Joshua 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."** Zerubbabel, the government leader, Joshua, the religious leader, and the whole group listened and acted. They accepted Haggai's words as the true word of God.

It may have happened a time or two when you second guessed church leaders or the government. Maybe you've thought a certain course of action was ill advised. Maybe you've grown sick and tired of the church telling you about your money or how to live your life. Careful because the Lord knows the yawns of indifference. He knows the motives of your hearts. He knows when you spend time and money impeccably decorating your own homes only to say things at church are good enough as they are. He knows when that offering envelope goes in only reluctantly, asking did I give too much. He knows the wealth you have, the time you give, and your priorities. He knows when your focus is not on him.

70 years in Babylon ended with a triumphant return to Israel, but getting caught spending more time on their houses than God's. Israel had done plenty to deserve exile, yet God was still with them. **"Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people: I am with you, declares the Lord."** What had they done to deserve him still hanging around, nothing. It was God's decision to be with them. It was his decision to not look the other way when they committed sin but rather promise a Messiah to bring them back. The loving God of free and faithful love pours out his grace on his people.

This same God is with us. In Christ his free and faithful love shines into our hearts. The more we have of God the more he gives us grace and blesses us. And grace stirs people to action. **"So the Lord stirred up the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty, their God."** Faith can't sit still. Faith demonstrates itself. You, who have faith in Christ, begin in God's house. Find ways to serve here. Be it on the grounds, in Sunday school, outreach, cleaning, mowing, serving food, providing offerings, or offering prayers. Continue in your own homes, serving and loving the family God gave you. Serve in the community. Put faith into action, loving and serving those around you.

There are always a variety of reasons children want to run away. Most don't give it a lot of thought. They think they'll have more freedom or more something, but it will never be enough. Sadly that attitude is not just in children. For God's response we look to Haggai's prophecy. **"Give careful thought to your ways"** and realize the more we have the more we want and the more we leave God. Better to get closer and get more of him. As he is glorified he gives us more of his grace in Christ.