

Pursuing God's Presence

by Jim Shaddix

Experiencing God's presence is not automatic, but requires a deliberate pursuit and prioritization of His presence in our lives.

Duration: 52:52

Scripture: Haggai 1:1

Topics: "God's Presence"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher addresses the problem of people living in excess while neglecting God's presence. He refers to Haggai 1:3, where God questions why people are dwelling in luxurious houses while neglecting the house of God. The preacher emphasizes the need for individuals to consider their ways and recognize the consequences of their actions. He encourages listeners to work for God and restore His presence in their lives, emphasizing the importance of relying on God's Spirit and grace. The sermon also touches on the tendency to blame external factors, such as the government or personal circumstances, instead of taking personal responsibility.

Transcript

Well, let's worship the Lord through His Word. If you have a copy of the Bible, I'm going to ask you to turn to the book of Haggai in the Old Testament. If you don't know where that is, take a moment to look in the table of contents in your Bible and find Haggai.

If you want an easier way, find the place between the Old Testament and the New Testament and then go in reverse for just a couple of books and you'll find it. Haggai chapter 1, while you're turning there, let me say thank you for the honor of being with you today. Thank you to your pastor for blessing me with the privilege of being in this wonderful church.

It's great to be back. I've had the opportunity to be here a couple of times and it's always, always been a great encouragement to me to be in this fellowship. In many journeys along the way between students and teachers, the teacher becomes the student and the student the teacher.

Such has been the case with my journey with David Platt. He has influenced my life greatly, as he has yours, and I thank God that he's here and that you are here with him. God's hand is on his life, is on you as a congregation, and he has trusted you with a stewardship, I believe, in the Western world to be an example of what it means to live in the place we live in in this country and yet develop a radical passion for

taking the gospel to the nations.

Thank you for doing that. We have so desperately needed that in our country. A couple years ago, I purchased a high-definition TV.

I know probably many of you have those. If you don't, you're probably not watching TV anymore. It's the order of the day, but they were kind of new then and I thought it'd be a cool deal.

Found one of those models of larger screen TVs that was going out of stock and got a pretty good deal on it. So excited, took it home, wired it up. For a week, I watched my high-definition TV and I was talking to my brother toward the end of that week and he was asking me about it.

I was explaining to him how cool it was and how much fun we were having, you know, watching the sporting events and all that kind of stuff and high-definition. And then he asked me a question. He said, well, now did you purchase the converter box or did you rent it? And there was this long pause on the phone from my end because I knew nothing about a converter box.

And so I asked him about it and he explained to me that you had to have this contraption that was, you know, would take the signals that high-definition was broadcast in and make it possible to watch them on your TV. And you know how it is when you kind of let the air out of a balloon and there's funny sounds and no power. That's kind of the way it was in my life.

I'd been watching high-definition TV for a week and I'd been watching the same analog broadcasts that I had all my life. No high-definition because the conversion wasn't made. I hope that didn't happen to you.

It's one thing for that to happen with something as trivial and earthly as a broadcast quality. It's an entirely different thing for that to happen when it comes to the presence of God in our lives, right? And in our churches. You see, because here's the deal.

We are the dwelling place of God in the Spirit. That's what Ephesians says. You as individual believers in Jesus Christ and me are the temple of God in these bodies that we have.

That is a theological reality. It is an eternal certainty. God dwells in us and He dwells in His people.

But listen to me, come in here real close. It is not a given just because of that, that we will experience the presence of God functionally, practically, in our daily lives, in doing life together as believers in the context of His church. It's not a given that that will happen.

And I wonder sometimes if there are not a whole lot of us that are playing with the presence of God, much like I did with high-definition TV, assuming that because you've got a high-definition TV, you're watching in high-definition, how tragic is it to assume that because you are the dwelling place of God in the Spirit and your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit that you are experiencing the presence of God to the greatest degree and with the greatest frequency? That would be a tragedy. That would be unacceptable. Haggai reminds us in 520 BC, I want to take you back there this morning that we cannot presume upon that.

The children of Israel had come back into the land after being exiled for about 48 years by the Babylonians and then the Persians. They had come back in 538 BC. Their temple had been leveled years before, but now they had been freed up to come back and be the people of God in their homeland.

They were still under Persian rule, but they were allowed to come back and they were allowed to begin to rebuild the temple. Don't miss the significance of that, and I won't take the time to do it this morning. I know you know this.

God had said on a number of occasions before when He had instructed Solomon to build the temple that this is the place where His glory would dwell. This is the place of His presence. And so the Old Testament economy, that temple, that physical structure was the icon of God's presence.

It stood for God's presence. No temple, no God's presence. The temple was there, God would meet His people there.

And so that was huge, that not only were they getting to come back into the homeland, but they were getting to rebuild the temple and restore their worship and really become physically and visibly the people of God that was to be a representation of the presence of God to all nations and through whom He would become a blessing to all people. I mean this was a big deal. And so they started to work and they came out of the gates fast, just like many of us come out of the gates fast in our Christian lives, excited about the presence of God.

Sometimes as churches we come out of the gates fast and the presence of God is there and we're pumped about it. That's the way the children of Israel were. And they began to work on rebuilding the temple and reestablishing, restoring God's presence among His people and they were pumped.

That went on for about nine months and then they quit. We don't know all the reasons they quit. We know some of them according to the book of Haggai, but they quit.

They threw down their tools. They stopped work. They went about other things.

And now God speaks into their lives and into their situation and says, this is not acceptable. What could be more important than you to not just be my people, but to neglect ensuring that you are experiencing my presence to the greatest degree with the greatest frequency? And I have a burden in my own life right now for my own life and my family that I would never be at the place that I would neglect the presence of God. And so Haggai, the prophet, is raised up and God sends him like He so often does.

When we're not seeking Him and we're not pursuing Him, He's looking for us. And in His grace and His mercy, He comes tracking us down and saying to us, I don't want you to live not experiencing my presence to the greatest degree with the greatest frequency and I don't want you to ever let up ensuring that that's a reality in your life, in your family, and in your church, because it's not automatic just because I dwell in you. You can't presume upon it.

So I want to take you back there in Haggai 1. The Word of God says in verse 1 of that chapter, 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 Shittael. He was kind of like the governor. Jewish citizen, Persian king, had appointed him to kind of be the political ruler, if you will.

And to Joshua, the son of Jehoshaddak, the high priest. He got all the bases covered. He got the government.

He got the worship life. The high priest is in place. And the Word of the Lord comes.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, these people say, the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord. Interesting way that God begins speaking about His people, right? Almost a disconnect. This people says.

In some translations, these people are saying, it's not the right time. Not my people, not my chosen ones. Now, I want you to understand, I believe they were still the people of God.

But I also believe there was something about their passiveness with regard to His presence that would cause Him to say, this people. You ever been at a place in your Christian life, those of you that have trusted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are a child of God. You are the people of God.

You ever been at one of those places where it just seems like God is a little bit distant? I mean, theologically, you know, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. You know that you are eternally secure. You are one of His chosen ones.

And as a church, that He has chosen to make you His dwelling place. But in your life experientially and functionally, God seems to be saying, this child. These people.

You see, there was something about the people's failure to rebuild the physical temple that caused there to be an experiential and functional distance between them and the God that dwelt in their midst, the God that they belonged to. And they were saying the thing that had caused that distance to seemingly be there and God's presence to be somewhere else was that they were saying, this is not a top priority. Now is not the time.

I don't know what's going on in your life today, individually and as families, but I have to ask you the question, is there anything that you might insert into this discussion right here and say, you know, I want to do the God thing. And I know God dwells in me, and I want to live for Him. And I want to be radical like this church is talking about.

And I want to risk it all, and I want to abandon this world, and I want to do this, but this is just not the time. There's some other things I've got to take care of. Some other things that are more of a priority.

There's some other things that I know I would be able to do that if I just got these things in order. Well, welcome to the club, and welcome to the nation of Israel in 520 BC. And welcome to the Word of the Lord.

God says, this people are saying, it's not the right time. Now I want to make sure that we're all on the same page here this morning with a connection, because you see, it's at this point right here that so many people are walking away from the Word of God. And I believe so many Christians turning up their noses at the Old Testament and walking away from the Word of the Lord, because they look and they say, what in the world, what in the world does this have to do with my life? 520 BC, here we are in 2009, Edith or 2010, nation of Israel coming back from exile.

We're right here in the United States of America, Birmingham, Alabama, everything's hunky-dory. What in the world does this say to me? Well, church, I want to give you two connections this morning to make sure that we understand that this is the Word of the Lord for us today. Listed them there in your worship guide.

Let me give you these two connections so that we make sure that we don't miss it. We are not talking about building a physical building. God knows we're going to have to answer in the Western world for the facilities we've built that sit empty all day long, when there are not only churches in the rest of the planet that have no place to worship, but there are people that are starving.

We're going to have to give an answer to that. And I want you to understand, I'm not talking about a building program here. Here's what I want you to get.

Connection number one, the presence of God is the ultimate expression of that Old Testament temple. The presence of God among His people. You can apply that individually to your family, but I want you to apply it most importantly to this faith family, this local body of believers that does life together.

God's presence among His people is the ultimate expression of that Old Testament temple. This was not plan B. We're not living in an afterthought of God. God didn't say, you know, I think I'll do the temple thing, and that's where I'll dwell, and then wake up one morning and say, you know what? My people aren't thinking too seriously about that, so I need to come up with something different.

I think I'll just dwell with my people in the Spirit. No, that's not what God did. God said, I'm going to establish something visual.

I'm going to establish something physical. But that ultimately is pointing to something eternal, and that's what He did not only with the temple, but all of those Old Testament sacrifices, and all of that stuff sometimes that we look at and say, that is so irrelevant and is so not today, it is not in my life. Oh, yes, it is.

Because what God was doing was much the same thing that happens when you open up your computer in the morning, and there's a bunch of icons on the desktop. Those icons are not the real deal. They simply represent the program that you're trying to get to, the functionality, the practicality, the thing that helps you accomplish something.

But you click on an icon that is a representation, and somehow it represents that program, and it indicates, and it points you in the right direction to get there. That's what God did with all of that Old Testament stuff, and that's what He did with the temple. He created an icon, and He said, I want people to click on this, and where it's going to take them ultimately is to the realization of my presence in the Spirit among my people.

Isn't that what He said in 1 Corinthians chapter 3? Do you not know that you are God's temple? Paul writing to the church, second person plural pronoun speaking to the corporate people of God. Do you not know this? Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him, for God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. It's almost like Paul was saying, what part of you are that temple do you not get? Do you not understand? You are that, and God takes it seriously.

He took it seriously physically in the Old Testament about rebuilding His temple, and the people were taking it passively. And the Corinthians on this side of the cross, like us, were looking and saying, oh, the time will come. I know theologically I'm the temple of God, and He dwells in my life, and He dwells in my church, but the time will come for me to take that seriously.

Listen, beloved, God takes it seriously. I mean, for Him to use language like that, if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. That's serious business.

God takes His people, experiencing Him functionally and practically, not just theologically, not just in theory, He takes that seriously. And so when we're in the book of Agii, and God's saying through Agii, you better get busy rebuilding the temple, we don't look at that and say, well, it's about this physical structure. We don't even look at that and say, well, it's about us building a new building right next to them.

And I want you to understand, it's really not about building physical structures in China or Indonesia or Uganda or someplace like that. What it is about is with the same passion and the same aggressiveness and the same seriousness in which God was calling them to rebuild the physical temple that His people today would pursue, experiencing His presence to the greatest degree and with the greatest frequency, because it is not automatic just because you're a Christian and just because you're an evangelical church. Connection number two.

God's presence among His people is the ultimate expression of that Old Testament temple, but I want you to know this too. Christ is the one who builds His church, we know that. Said that in Matthew 16, on this rock I will build my church.

Christ is the one who builds His church, but don't forget this, that His followers are the crew that He uses. His followers are the crew that He uses. You know, we live in a day where grace is so abused, and there are some in the church today that, I mean, that's all they're singing about, it's all they're preaching, that's all they're chanting, it's grace, grace, grace, grace, grace, as if it were disconnected from busting your tail for the glory of God and for the advancement of the gospel.

They cannot reconcile grace and working for God. And that's understandable, because we know we don't work for our salvation. We know that that is by the grace of God, and there's nothing that we bring to the table.

But beloved, let me tell you something, when God saves you and He fills you with His Spirit, He sends you into the fields to work, and it's hard work. And it's everything work is about in other places. It takes sacrifice, and it's tough, and it wears you out.

And the New Testament is filled with references to this. Many Christians today forget that Jesus, yes, is the one who is building His church, but He has chosen to use you and me to be the instruments in His hand and fellow workers. Here's what Paul said in the same context that I read to you from a moment ago, 1 Corinthians 3, for we are God's fellow what? Workers, right? We're His fellow workers.

You're God's field, God's building, according to the grace of God given to me like a skilled master builder. I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it, for no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is who? This is the audience participation part of our program.

Which is who? Jesus Christ. Isn't that interesting? Haggai 520 BC, people came back into the town, came back into the land, laid the foundation and quit. And over on this side of the cross, the Apostle Paul looks at the Corinthian church and he says, I laid a foundation.

There's only one foundation, Jesus Christ. And then he refers to Christians as His fellow workers, His builders, and the ones who build upon that foundation. And beloved, let me appeal to you this morning that you would never be a Christian and never be a church that sees the one and only foundation laid, Jesus Christ, and then quits, throws in the towel, puts up the tools with regard to building on that foundation, that they might experience the presence of God to the greatest degree and with the greatest frequency.

So there's some responsibility here. There's something we must look at, something we must do. Now, let me show you the problem in Haggai chapter 1. Describe it in three ways.

First of all, the problem was this, people were living in excess while neglecting God's presence. Living in excess while neglecting God's presence. Look at verse 3 in Haggai 1, "...then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies in ruins?" Now, I want to go ahead and give you a heads up and tell you that in just a moment I want to speak to you about difficult economic times because that was a reality in this day and time.

And from all indications here in the book of Haggai, that was probably the biggest reason they had put the work on hold. And so when God speaks to them about what they were doing at the neglect of reestablishing the presence of God by rebuilding the temple, He was not speaking to them about simply sustaining their lives and providing for their families. If you look there in verse 4, He asked the question, is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your, and this is a word you want to underline or put a circle around or put a star around, in your paneled houses? Bible scholars would tell us that this was a description of what we might call, watch this now, adornment.

It was not the necessities of life. It wasn't that they had said, look, I got to get a roof over my family's head and then I can take care of the temple of God. That's not what it was.

When He described what they were pursuing as paneled houses, He was speaking of their excess, more than that which was enough. And He asked the question, is it time for that? That's the priority? That's what you're pursuing at the neglect of the pursuit of the presence of God in your life, in your church's life? That's what you say you must invest your time in first? God didn't rebuke them for providing for their families. He rebuked them for excess.

And you know what will grieve the Spirit? You know what squelches the presence of God? Do you know what neglects His presence? Even though we are a dwelling place for God in the Spirit and our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, you know what keeps us from experiencing Him practically and functionally? It is in our Western world economy, the pursuit of excess, more than is enough, more than we need at the neglect of the pursuit of His presence in our lives. I'm quite certain, I'm not here every Sunday obviously, but I know you're pastor enough to know that it's probably not the first time you've heard a description like that. And so let me just be another voice this morning that calls your attention to God's Holy Word, to a people in another time and another place who are given for our learning, the New Testament says, all these things were done to teach us, a people in another time and another place that God said to, you are neglecting My presence because you are pursuing not just what is sufficient, but you're pursuing excess.

And may God forbid that it would happen in our lives. Let me tell you another part of the problem. Interpreting economic stress and vain effort incorrectly.

Interpreting economic stress and vain effort incorrectly. Now listen to me, even before we read this, if you've ever been one of those persons that's even been tempted to set the Word of God aside and say, that's irrelevant for my life. Or even if you've been one of those New Testament believers who've had a tendency to say, you know, I am on this side of the cross and that Old Testament stuff is really not that relevant for my life.

Watch this, OK? Look at verse 5. Now therefore, says the Lord, consider your ways. Some translations, think carefully. Now watch this.

This instruction is going to show up a couple of different times in this chapter, three or four different times in the book of Haggai. It was not rhetoric. God wasn't just looking for something to take time in the

message.

It's a phrase in the language of the New Testament that says, stop what you're doing and look closely and think about this. And here's what He says, consider your ways. You've sown much and harvested little.

You eat, but you never have enough. You drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourself, but no one is warm.

And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. Anybody this morning say, this guy's reading my mail? I'm in that rat race. We can't catch ourselves going and coming.

Soccer leagues and work and church and these lessons over here and the extracurricular activities and Shaddix, Haggai knows where my life is because there's still more month left when my paycheck runs out. Anybody there? That's a pretty good description, isn't it? Of where a lot of us live in the Western world. You ever had that thought? I just, you know, it's like there's a back door on my bank account and I deposit my check and it just disappears.

I can't catch up and I can't slow down. Let me tell you this, I'm going to tell you where most of us come to because we never get below a surface interpretation. Let me just start nationally or globally for a moment with the current economic crisis.

Let me tell you where most of us land. Land was saying, well, it was Bush's fault. No, it's Obama's fault.

It's Congress's fault. If we just had a better government, if we just had people playing close change, or we just had this plan over here, then that would address this economic quagmire that we found ourselves in. Personally, what it comes to is I just need to work harder.

I just need a better job. If I made more money, if I had a better career, then I wouldn't be in this mess and I wouldn't be in the rat race and everything would be okay and we move from one thing to another, pursuing more excess and never interpreting our rat race and our economic quagmire any deeper than the surface. And that's why God says, time out.

Stop. Check out just for a moment and look and think and look at your life and look at your church. Consider your ways.

And then he gives this description right here, the description of a economic crisis. Now I want you to look down at verse 9 and let me show you the deeper understanding of why the rat race happens most often and why. Just consider it for a moment.

Many of us may be in economic crisis. You looked for much and behold, it came to little. And when you brought it home, watch it now, don't miss it, I blew it away.

Why would you do that, God? Because of my house that lies in ruins. While each of you busies himself, in the language of the Old Testament, the phrase means is running for. While each of you is running for his own house, therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew and the earth has withheld its produce and I have called for a drought on the land and the hills on the grain, the new wine.

I have called for a drought, it says, the oil on what the ground brings forth on man and beast and on all their labors. Just for your consideration, could it be that at least the experience of the church in economic crisis in our country today might have a little bit to do with this right here? But if we don't ever go below the

surface to ask the deeper questions and consider our ways, we never will interpret it like that. And so I would just ask you this morning, is it possible that the presence of God functionally and experientially has been squelched or grieved in your life today because you're not getting below the surface and asking the question, is God possibly drying it up? Is he possibly spinning the wheels a little bit because he is so serious about his presence in my life and I'm not? Problem number three, seeking personal comfort over God's pleasure and glory.

Seeking personal comfort over God's pleasure and glory. Look at verse 7, thus says the Lord of hosts, consider your ways. There it is again, think carefully about this.

Go up to the hills and bring the wood and build the house. Purpose clause, that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified, says the Lord. I ask you a question.

You know, at my church, and I know it's not different than yours here at Brook Hills, we sing a lot about the glory of God and we preach about the glory of God. It's even in our passion statement, mission statement, purpose statement, whatever you - we say together, here's why we exist, bottom line, to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ among all people. That's why we exist.

That's why you exist. And I know through the preaching and teaching and the music, that is a value that is expressed and it is embraced and it's celebrated. But I want to ask you just a practical question this morning.

If God bodily showed up at your door this afternoon, knocked on the door, and you opened it up, and He said, do you really want to bring me pleasure? Or He said, do you really want to glorify me? Have you ever heard - by the way, have you ever said that? Have you ever heard anybody say that? Well, you know what? I'm not here to please man, I'm just here to please God. I just want to glorify God. If God asked you today, if He came and He just very, in a physical way, said, are you serious about that? You really want to bring pleasure to me? Could you entertain just for a moment the possibility that this is what He might say? I mean, there it is in black and white.

He wrote it down. He sent the prophet Haggai, and He said, let me tell you what brings pleasure to me. And let me tell you how you can glorify me.

Build the temple. Go get the lumber. Quit sitting around with your theological, mystical excuses, and get busy building the temple that I said would be the place my presence resides.

Sometimes obvious answers staring us right in the face, right? Sometimes God's not speaking anymore about subjects that we think we need the will of God on. Well, I'm just praying who God wants me to witness to. Lord, give me somebody to witness to today.

And God's already said, after the Holy Spirit's come upon you, you will be my witnesses. God's not talking on that deal anymore. We have to wait for a revelation.

Well, I wonder, you know, I don't know that I'm called to go to the nations. Well, let me tell you, you better be asking if you're not called, because you've already been called. You don't have to sit around waiting for some impression, some mystical experience that says, now I'm calling you.

I called you to myself. Now I'm calling you to take the gospel. That call's already been given.

God's not talking on that deal anymore. Same thing with His presence. Same thing.

God says, I've already answered that question. Rebuild my house. Build a structure on the foundation.

Go to work. You see, we can't just sing about this glory of God and pleasure of God thing. We can't just preach about it.

We need to make it happen. I'm not talking about a work salvation. I'm talking about something that's motivated by the grace of God in our lives.

When you get Jesus, and you get His Spirit inside of you, you want to please God. And you know what brings pleasure to God? He wants you to know Him and experience Him to the greatest degree, with the greatest frequency, not with a theological concept, not just with the reality that He indwells us. He wants you to experience Him and me to experience Him to the greatest degree, with the greatest frequency, every moment of every day.

And that is not automatic. By the way, if you want another parallel for this, think about the role of the Spirit in your life and mine. I think most of us would agree this morning that when a person repents of their sin and confesses Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, that they are baptized with the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit indwells them, right? That's a theological reality.

We know that. But what is not automatic is a thing called the fullness of the Spirit, right? I mean, over and over again, believers were filled with the Spirit, and then they were filled with the Spirit again. We are beckoned to pursue walking in the Spirit.

So obviously, in the individual believer's life, there is this reality that the Holy Spirit dwells in us, but the New Testament calls us to pursue the functional experience of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It's not automatic. By the way, it's not automatic for churches either.

God dwells in His people, not a physical place, right? I mean, you can check this out in the book of Revelation and look at heaven and look at what eternity is going to be about. It says there's no temple because God's a temple, and He dwells among His people. That's what the Old Testament structure was pointing to, and that's what we are practicing for right now.

It is a reality. God dwells in the midst of His people. But just like with the individual and the fullness of the Spirit, it doesn't mean that we as the people of God, any given local congregation experiences His presence to the greatest degree with the greatest frequency.

So what do we do? Well, this is one of those good news stories. People of God got it. They missed it a lot in the Old Testament.

There are a couple of different places where they got it. This is one of them. Word of God had come to them through Haggai, and verse 12 says, Then Zerubbabel the son of Shittael, the governor, got in on this deal, and Joshua the son of Jehoshaddak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God and the words of Haggai the prophet.

Here's the first thing that we need to do, and that is obey God regarding the urgency of rebuilding His temple, of pursuing His presence. Just obey. This is the word of the Lord.

The Lord says, I'm not satisfied with you not experiencing My presence to the greatest degree with the greatest frequency. Do you agree, and will you obey? And the Bible says the people obey. I want you to mark that word urgency there in that statement because you've got to make this contrast, okay? You've got to make the contrast between back at the beginning of the chapter when the people were saying it's not yet time.

You know, the interesting thing about this is there's no indication that the people were not saying that the presence of God was unimportant. They weren't even saying that rebuilding the temple wasn't a good thing and a needed thing. They were simply saying, I've got other things that are more important.

I've got other things I've got to take care of. There are boxes that I need to check off before that can become a priority in my life. And what they didn't realize is it was about their excess and it was about them missing that God took this seriously and it was an urgent deal.

And so you see the issue of obedience suggests immediacy, urgency. I'm not sure there's any such thing in the Bible called delayed obedience or conditional obedience. Those are contradictory terms, oxymorons.

They don't go together. Obedience means now. And so what do we do? Whatever it is that squelches the presence of God in our lives.

What we can identify or in our church. This is the word of the Lord. Now is the time to change that.

Right now. So obey God with regard to the urgency of restoring His presence. Secondly, this is going to bug some of you.

Listen carefully. Fear God and the consequences of failing to pursue His presence. Fear God and the consequences of failing to pursue His presence.

Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that there are consequences to sin? All in favor say aye. Even in grace, right? Filled with the Spirit, child of God, on my way to heaven we still live in these fleshly bodies.

We can still grieve God's Spirit and their consequences. God doesn't take our salvation away, but many times neither does He take away the consequences of sin. Look at the end of verse 12, and the people feared the Lord.

This is a pretty good concept. Now remember, this is one of the times they got it. This is a pretty good grasp of this issue of the seriousness of holiness and righteousness and not presuming upon the presence of God in our lives.

It's this idea of fear. Now I understand, I understand that, you know, we don't like the concept of fear that indicates trembling in one's boots. We kind of like the lovey-dovey, touchy-feely, just in reverence to God, and I want you to know that I believe that.

But let me tell you about the other side of it. The other side of fear is really believing that sin is serious and neglecting God's presence is serious, and there are consequences that follow that. And it is this idea of fear that maintains the healthy biblical tension of us understanding who God is and who we are and the difference between the two.

And so what do we do? We just need to make sure that we have a little bit of seriousness, a whole lot of seriousness about this thing of pursuing the presence of God and the fact that there are consequences to not doing that. This morning David and I were praying, and one of the prayers I know that rolled off my lips is something that's there frequently, and that is just a confession to God. God, I'm sorry about the time that I've wasted in my life, and there's been a lot of it.

I don't want to dwell and let Satan have a foothold in making me live in the past, but you know, I look back on my life a lot of times, and I know that there are a lot of things God was wanting to do that now has passed, and I won't be able to accomplish for Him and for His glory and His praise. There are consequences. There are consequences in families.

There are consequences to our bodies. There are consequences in churches. And so this is simply a statement about taking that seriously.

Number three, what do we do? Well, we work for God. We work for God to restore His presence, to pursue His presence. Verse 13, Then Haggai, the messenger of the Lord, spoke to the people with the Lord's message.

Now watch this, I am with you, declares the Lord. Beloved, we don't just work, we work in the power of His Spirit, right? By His grace. I'm with you, declares the Lord.

And the Lord, I love this, He stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Shittael, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, and the son of Jehoshaddak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people. Everybody got stirred up. Everybody got serious.

And God honored their repentance. And isn't it interesting that the words obey and fear are used before the description of their spirits being stirred up? And here's what I believe. If we'll just do what Jesus said, if you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And we'll just obey Him, and we'll maintain that healthy tension because we believe there's consequences to our neglect, and our passivity, and our sin, that we'll walk in the fear of the Lord, that God in His grace stirs up the spirit in the individual heart and life, in the church, in the people of God, that they might go to work. You see, here's the grace part. Here's where it is.

They didn't start by saying, well, let's just work. They obeyed, and they feared, and God stirred up their spirit, and He stirred up their spirit that they were willing to do whatever it took, change whatever needed to be changed in their lives in order to pursue the presence of God in their lives. And look at what it says at the end of verse 14, and they came and they worked on the house of the Lord of hosts.

Don't miss this now. Their God. Isn't that cool? You say, what's cool about it? Verse 2, verse 2 in the chapter that says the Lord of the hosts, this people, these people, distance, grieved Holy Spirit.

There is an experiential, functional distance between us and God that makes it seem like there is a gap, and all of a sudden we get to the end, and God stirs up their spirit, and it's not this people anymore, these people. It's their God. And you know what? He's your God, and He's mine, your Savior and mine, and He's personal, and He's real, and He never moved.

He never moved. He indwells your body if you've confessed Him as your Savior and Lord, and He makes your church the dwelling place for Him in the Spirit. That is a reality.

He never moved. But beloved, when we come to the place where we understand that it's not automatic, and we obey, and we fear, and He stirs our spirit, and we go to work in hot pursuit, the gap is closed, and we are His people, and He is our God experientially. I've given you a list on the back of your worship guide that answers a very important question.

And if you haven't read down through it, I don't want you to just yet. I want you to look up here because I want you to listen to me for a moment. When we do this theological connection between 520 B.C. and Haggai and rebuilding a physical temple, all the way over here to 2009 in Birmingham, Alabama, on this side of the cross, when we make that connection, and we understand that we as the people now are His dwelling place in the Spirit, and we understand that He builds His church, and the foundation of Jesus is laid, but we are to build upon that.

We get those two things. There's still something very important for us to ask that the New Testament answers very clearly. How do we do that? Okay, Chaddix, you told us we need to obey, and we need to fear the consequences of not obeying, and we need to go to work, but what does that look like? And it raises a very important question, and that is, does the New Testament answer that question? In other words, is there anything in the New Testament that speaks to us experiencing God functionally and practically, not just theologically and conceptually? And what I've done is I've listed about 15 places in the New Testament.

This list is not exhaustive. In fact, that's one of the things I want to ask you to do this week. I want to ask you to go home and think about that question.

Where in the New Testament do I find places where God says, here's a connection between something that you are, something that you do, and experiencing my presence? Just for example, look down that list a little bit. Restoring sinning members, right? Something that's neglected in the New Testament church today. And God says, you know, when you do this and you do it rightly, Jesus said to his disciples, you can be sure that where two or three are gathered together for this purpose, this hard thing, but this loving thing, when you do that, you can be guaranteed that I will, what? Be in your midst, right? Ministering to the suffering, Matthew 25.

Jesus said, I was hungry, you fed me. I was naked, you clothed me. I was in prison, you came to see me.

His disciples said, when did that happen? When did we experience you like that? He said, inasmuch as you did it to the least of these, my brethren, you've done it unto me. Some of you have hardened your heart about ministering to suffering people because you're so prosperous, like every one of us in this room in the western church, and your lives are insulated, and this message is hard, and you've put up barriers. But I want you to understand this.

If you're going to obey, and you're going to fear, and you're going to go to work, it's going to mean ministering to the suffering. And that's probably going to mean rearranging your lives a little bit. Number three, making Christ's disciples of all people.

I'm sure this is a passage that y'all haven't heard around here in a long time, and a concept I know that is not familiar to you, but let me, can I just remind you how Jesus ends that statement of make disciples of all people? And lo, I am what? With you always, even at the end of the age. That was not just a theological conclusion to a sermon. It was a statement that you will experience my presence and know my presence to the greatest degree and the greatest frequency when you're taking the gospel to the nations, and not

just looking out for number one.

Pursuing Christ's greater works, loving, obeying Christ, abiding in Christ, sharing Christ with others. Look at number eight. This is for those of you that may be here today on a journey, and you've yet to confess Jesus as your Savior and Lord, let me tell you the beginning place of experiencing God's presence in your life.

Acts 2:38 says, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you're here today without Christ, and you've been on a journey asking questions, or a friend graciously brought you, or whatever landed you in the seat today, I want you to know this is a starting point for you. Most of the rest on this list have to do with people who already know Christ, but for you here's the beginning point.

Repent of your sins and place your faith in Jesus Christ and him alone for salvation. And the New Testament says you'll get God's presence.

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