

Defeating Discouragement

Haggai 2:1-9

Bethany Assembly of God

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Central Proposition: God can empower you to defeat discouragement.

Introduction

Discouragement is a daunting enemy for God's people. Sometimes, we think of discouragement as seasons when we're just a little down, we're not feeling quite ourselves. But discouragement is more than that.

Discouragement prevents us from accomplishing God's purposes for us. You can see this problem throughout the history of God's people. Think of one of the iconic moments in the Bible, the fight between David and Goliath. The enemies of God's people had provoked, raided and robbed Israel. Now, the Philistines had gathered their troops for battle and King Saul and the army of Israel had gone out to meet them. They were finally going to do something about this enemy who had been harassing them for years. But when they arrived on the battlefield, out came the giant, Goliath. He was massive and he was defying Israel and calling for them to send a representative champion to fight him. **1 Samuel 17:11** says, "When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid."

The courage was drained out of them. They came ready for battle, pumped up because of their king and recent victories, but then, they were deflated.

We all face discouragement. Sometimes, our personalities and internal thoughts are inclined toward discouragement. Sometimes, we believe that the past determines the future and so, we feel defeated before we try. Sometimes, our spiritual enemy, the devil, is at work to bring discouragement through our fears, our past, the words of other people, anxiety, comparison, and the like. This happens to churches. The leadership gets discouraged and the people are discouraged. Division, bitterness, and rivalries can occur that deflate or discourage us from pursuing the purposes of God.

Last week, we saw that God spoke through the prophet Haggai, confronting His people's misplaced priorities, exposing their excuses, and calling them to put Him first and build His house, the temple. And they responded. God assured them that He was with them and stirred up their spirits and they got to work. But after about 7 weeks, they got discouraged. Something happened along the way that caused the hearts of God's people to deflate, whether delays, unmet expectations, or comparisons with the past. They were discouraged and it was jeopardizing their obedience to build God's house.

Read **Haggai 2:1-3**

As I said, this was about 7 weeks after Haggai first addressed their disobedience. The date would have been the last day of a week-long feast called “The Feast of Booths.” This was a celebration of Israel’s from slavery in Egypt. For a week people would have been living in booths – temporary shelters made of palm branches and tree boughs – to remember how they lived when God delivered them. It was also a time when the harvest was celebrated, and people from all over the countryside would have come to set up these booths in Jerusalem, and there, right before them was the Temple, or what was left of it. Apparently, they hadn’t gotten very far on the repairs. It didn’t look very grand. And they were supposed to be celebrating the provision of the harvest, but if you remember, **Haggai 1:6** says, “You have sown much, but harvested little.”

You can imagine everyone there, living in close proximity; it’s supposed to be a time when you’re celebrating God’s house, His provision, but it’s utterly disappointing. They start comparing its previous splendor to its current, pitiable state, and they’re discouraged, and they’re discouraging the people around them.

That discouragement threatens the work God has ordered. It threatens to repeat what happened the first time around. Remember, 15 years earlier, a group of exiles had returned and laid the foundations of the temple, but they grew discouraged and stopped the work. Part of that discouragement is described in Ezra 3:10-12.

Discouragement was setting in and being amplified by comparisons to the past. But then God stepped in. He didn’t fix everything for the people, instead, He injected courage. He sent Haggai to encourage His discouraged people and empower them to continue. **God can empower you to defeat discouragement.** He’s done it on many occasions. He typically doesn’t do it by removing the obstacles, but by reminders for His people.

Since we all face discouragement and since discouragement can derail the work of God through a church, how important is it that we would learn to defeat discouragement? It’s vital. God can empower you to defeat discouragement. Let’s see how He does it and how you should respond.

1. Receive the reassurance of His presence.

Read Haggai 2:4-5

- The people who remembered the glory of the previous temple weren’t wrong. It was magnificent and far surpassed anything they could hope for the rebuilding. The new temple looked to be smaller and less ornate. They weren’t being scolded for recognizing reality, but they were being warned not to be discouraged, not to discourage others, and not to measure the present by the past.
- God tells them, “Be strong. Work. Fear not.” Was this some kind of halftime speech, filled with hype but no substance? No! The motive for their courage was God’s presence.
- When we’re discouraged, it’s easy to assume that God is not with us.
- God is with us. He told the remnant rebuilding the temple that He was still fulfilling the covenant or promise He made to them hundreds of years earlier when He brought them

out of Egypt, that He would be with them and they would be His people. We have a similar, but even greater promise through Jesus. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us.

- God even reassured them that His Spirit was among them. And His Spirit is among us as well and not only among us, but *in* us.
- When we forget that God is with us, we give up strength, we lose purpose, and we lose holiness.

Maybe you've done this in your family. You began with good intentions. You had your kids dedicated to the Lord. But then, you realized that there was a lot that happens behind the scenes with kids. It's not easy. There is discipline involved, for you and them. There are sacrifices. There are attitudes, both yours and theirs. Parent, build the house of the Lord by building your family. Work, for God is with you.

We would like for Him to have said, "There is no need to work, for I am with you. I will do everything for you." But He didn't. God's presence is not an excuse not to work; it's the strength and motive for building His house.

Church, God is with us. Jesus left us a mission, that God has called and planted us here for a purpose and we should be encouraged that God is with us, but that also means we should work. We should work serving one another with all the skills and spiritual gifts God has provided. At Bethany, we talk a lot about partnership. We want to be co-laborers in the gospel. You can come to be encouraged AND to encourage others. You can come to worship and to work for the Lord in serving others.

Maybe you are aware of some sin in your life that you feel is keeping you at bay. Remember, if you confess your sin, He is faithful and just and will forgive you and cleanse you. Take a moment to confess and repent.

2. Refocus on His (pro)vision.

Sometimes all we can see is discouragement. Things don't seem to be going right, we have more need than provision, our prayers aren't answered. In times like these, it's important that we not only hold onto God's presence but also His promises. We must learn to walk by faith in God and not based on what we see. This is where so many people give up. When it becomes difficult to believe or to do the work of the Lord, their faith shrivels.

These are the times when we need to refocus on God's vision and His provision. Sometimes, I walk around our building and I see tattered carpet, stained ceiling tiles, broken door knobs, and all the other things that could be fixed. It's easy to forget that the carpet is tattered by the feet of many who have entered and heard the good news. But my first thought, your first thought should be, "God has a plan." We should walk by faith and not by sight.

Read **Haggai 2:6-9**

What did God mean when He said that He was going to shake the whole world and all the nations?

- **Psalm 114** can help us understand this imagery. The salvation of God's people from Israel was a cataclysmic event. Even nature obeyed God and got out of the way. But it wasn't just nature, nations were forever changed as well. The political landscape shifted as God redeemed His people.
- As the remnant of God's people who had come back from exile stood looking at the rubble of the temple, the slow progress, and their lack of resources, God reminded them of what He had done before. He shook the earth to accomplish His purposes. And He said He was going to do it again. Nations would come to Israel and bring their treasure to furnish God's house.

This brings up the question of whether that actually happened. Has this promise been fulfilled? I think Bible teacher Peter Verhoeff is correct when he suggests that the promise was fulfilled and is being fulfilled in stages.

- A. The temple was completed after four years and some treasure was restored by emperor Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:15).
- B. The temple was expanded and adorned to an unimaginable degree by Herod (Mark 13:1).
- C. Jesus Himself entered the temple.
- D. An application to Christ and the Church may be implied since Christ is the fullness of God, through whom God reconciled all things to himself, and has made peace (cf. Haggai 2:9) by His cross (Col. 1:19-20), and God is making His people a temple (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Eph. 2:21-22).
- E. The promise will be fulfilled when Christ returns and we receive a Kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:26-28). The nations will bring their glory to the city of God and the Lamb (Rev. 21:24-26).

Yes, it has been fulfilled and is being fulfilled. God has shaken the nations and even at the time of Christ, the temple was more magnificent than the small remnant Haggai spoke to could ever have imagined. And God is still shaking the nations through His Son Jesus. People from every tribe and tongue are being gathered into His people and being made a temple for the Holy Spirit. The latter glory of the house is greater than the former glory, and it is only increasing.

And for us, at a very local scale, this means that in our lives and in our church we should not be discouraged but learn to walk by faith and not by sight. **We need to refocus on God's vision and His provision so that we can continue His work.**

In verse 8, God says, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine." My question is, if He owns the silver and the gold and wants us to work, why doesn't He just give it to us now? Let me suggest that the reason He doesn't give us the silver and gold up front is because He wants us to learn to trust Him. This is the walk of faith. God calls us to His presence before He makes the provision.

We must be a church that seeks God's presence and then trusts His provision enough to obey, to do the work He calls us to do. Christianity is not a religion in which you believe something and then go about your life, hoping that God blesses you and that you'll go to heaven when you die. To be a Christian is to engage in the work of God's Kingdom.

Conclusion

If you're discouraged, if you've stopped the work of God in your life or through your gifts, God wants to empower you to defeat that discouragement. God's design for you isn't that you would live dejected, without hope, with eyes cast down on the problems. He doesn't guarantee comfort or ease, because He doesn't want us to rely on ourselves. He is with us and His vision for the future and ability to provide for it is greater than you can imagine. He has already shown that through the resurrection of His Son Jesus. Will you trust Him?