

IS IT A TIME FOR YOU YOURSELVES TO BE LIVING IN YOUR PANELED HOUSES, WHILE THIS HOUSE REMAINS A RUIN?

Haggai 1:1-15

Why do we procrastinate? Blogger Tim Urban theorizes that the chronic procrastinator is really a rational decision-maker who tries to coexist with a pet: the instant gratification monkey.

The Instant Gratification Monkey is the last creature who should be in charge of decisions—he thinks *only* about the present, ignoring lessons from the past and disregarding the future altogether, and he concerns himself entirely with maximizing the ease and pleasure of the current moment. He doesn't understand the Rational Decision-Maker any better than the Rational Decision-Maker understands him—why would we continue doing this jog, he thinks, when we could stop, which would feel better. Why would we practice that instrument when it's not fun? Why would we ever use a computer for work when the internet is sitting right there waiting to be played with? He thinks humans are insane.

In the monkey world, he's got it all figured out—if you eat when you're hungry, sleep when you're tired, and don't do anything difficult, you're a pretty successful monkey. The problem for the procrastinator is that he happens to live in the human world, making the Instant Gratification Monkey a highly unqualified navigator.*

The returned Jewish exiles had never heard of the instant gratification monkey, but they had put their own “ease and pleasure” above the task of rebuilding of the Lord's temple.

*Tim Urban, “Why Procrastinators Procrastinate,” *Wait But Why* (blog), October 30, 2013, <http://waitbutwhy.com/2013/10/why-procrastinators-procrastinate.html>.

Group Discussion. How do you decide what is most important?

Personal Reflection. How satisfied are you with your priorities?

After Persia conquered Babylon, King Cyrus decreed that the exiled Jews could return to their homeland and rebuild the ruined temple of the Lord (Ezra 1:1-4). Thousands of Jews made the journey. Even before they began to rebuild the temple, they built a new altar and resumed the appointed sacrifices according to the law (Ezra 3:1-6). In 536 BC the foundation was laid for a new temple, although one less grand than Solomon's (Ezra 3:7-13). Opposition arose, and the Jews stopped work for about sixteen years until the second year of King Darius (Ezra 4:1-5, 24). At that time the prophet Haggai received the word of the Lord. *Read Haggai 1:1-11.*

1. As Haggai's prophecy begins, what problem is immediately obvious?
2. Consider the Lord's question in verse 3. Why is "no" the only reasonable answer?
3. About five hundred years earlier, King David desired to build a house for the Lord. He thought it wasn't right that he lived in a cedar palace while the ark of God resided in a tent (2 Samuel 7:1-2). How did the attitude of the returned exiles differ from that of David (v. 4)?

4. What are some possible reasons the returned exiles had neglected the work on the temple?

5. What does it mean today to build up the house (or temple) of the Lord?

6. What causes Christians to neglect active involvement in ministry, whether to non-Christians or to each other?

7. In Haggai's time, how did the Lord discipline the people for their neglect of his house (vv. 5-11)?

8. How do you think the people complained about the results of the Lord's discipline?

9. Through Haggai the Lord twice said, “Give careful thought to your ways” (vv. 5, 7). Consider your own local church fellowship. What specific things are happening among you that help build up the Lord’s house?

10. What is happening in your own life—whether through involvement in ministries of your church, in the wider community, or on your own—to build up the Lord’s house?

11. Read *Haggai 1:12-15*. The Lord assured the people that he was with them in the building effort, and he stirred up the spirits of the leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua. How did the people respond?

12. If Haggai were to talk to you about your involvement in building up the Lord’s house, what do you think he would say?

13. What steps will you take to evaluate what you are doing (or failing to do) for the Lord?



Pray for a calm spirit as you evaluate ways you are neglecting the building up of the Lord's house, whether through laziness or through over-busyness. Ask the Lord for wisdom to make needed changes in your priorities and to follow through with your decisions.

NOW OR LATER

The aim of this study is not to get you to sign up for every volunteer opportunity you see in the church bulletin. You may already be *too* involved in so many activities that you need to step back and reevaluate what you are doing and why you are doing it. Consider which activities build up the Lord's house and which are busywork or could be done better by someone else.

Look back on the history of your own church fellowship, as far as you are aware of it. Also look back on the history of your own spiritual life. Have you had times of more active and focused involvement in ministry that have faded away? If so, what happened, and how might that energy for ministry be restored?