

Topic - First Things First: The Challenge to Build

Date/s - 13 January 2019

Scripture - Haggai 1:1-15

Speaker/s - Pastor Ernie Song

Welcome [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

www.thesource4ym.com/games/

www.christianitytoday.com/smallgroups/articles/icebreakersbeyond.html < go to LEAD, click on ICEBREAKERS >

Worship [15 min]

You may select songs like "This Is Amazing Grace", "Be Enthroned", "Stay Amazed" or "Worthy Of It All".

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the cell discussion, cell members will:

1. Commit to building their spiritual house in 2019
2. Commit to building the church in 2019

Word [45 min]

Last week's sermon was the inaugural message for 2019. Pastor Ben Lee exhorted the church to have a fresh start with God, and to look ahead to greater things in God.

This week's sermon kicks off a four-part series on the book of Haggai, which was a call to the Israelites – *a call to build*.

Background – Return from exile

In 606 BC, the Israelites were exiled from the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. In the process, the Temple was destroyed. In 538 BC, the first group of Israelites returned to Judah, and work soon commenced to rebuild the Temple. However, there was Samaritan opposition to the rebuilding effort and the work stopped for 15 years. Meanwhile, the Israelites continued building their own houses and settling down in their own lives. Rebuilding the temple was no longer a priority. It was in this context that Haggai brought a message from God to the Israelites: it was time to rebuild God's Temple.

Pastor Ernie drew three lessons from this passage.

1. Discipline

Verse 6 describes the plight of the Israelites: They sow but harvest little. They eat and drink but are never filled. They are clothed but are never warm. They earn wages but lose it very quickly. In short, they were ineffective in whatever they put their hands to do. This was the consequences of the Israelites not putting *first things first*: they neglected to rebuild God's Temple. Instead, building their own houses, they focused on their own comfort.

Pastor Ernie used his own household as an illustration of what discipline means. When his children do not obey him, there are consequences to bear. It is similar in God's household. When the Israelites failed to obey the Lord, they bore the consequence of that failure. God disciplines those He loves, just as a good father should

(Heb 12:6). However, Pastor Ernie encouraged us, saying that the purpose of God's discipline is not to make us suffer, but to mature us into His likeness.

Are you experiencing repeated failure or not getting the breakthrough that you desire? Maybe God wants to grow us into His likeness. Dear friend, do not despise His loving discipline.

2. Priorities

Why was the Temple so important to God that He disciplined them for not rebuilding it? In Exo 25:8, God specifically commanded the Israelites to build Him a Temple "that I may dwell among them". The Temple was central to the Israelites' worship of God. Even so, when the Israelites returned from exile, they neglected to rebuild it. Pastor Ernie drew our attention to the self-deception of the Israelites: the Temple was simply not a priority to the Israelites.

What about us? Are our priorities in the right place? Are we deceiving ourselves about the priorities in our lives? Do we focus on building our careers, always wanting to earn more money to improve our standard of living, to the extent of ignoring to build God's house? None of these ambitions are wrong in and of themselves, but if the house of God is neglected due to this, then we do not have our priorities in the right place. Pastor Ernie exhorts us to awaken from self-deception. God must always take first place in our lives.

How does it look like when we put God first? Pastor Ernie gave us two thoughts to reflect and act upon:

1. Build your spiritual house. 1 Cor 3:16 reminds us that we are God's temple and that His Spirit dwells in us. We build our spiritual house when we make God the focus and centre of our lives.
2. Build your church. In this day and age of consumeristic Christianity, Pastor Ernie encouraged us to not be a consumer, but a builder. Commit to building your church. Commit to building RiverLife Church.

3. The Glory of God

In verse 8, God says to the Israelites to build the temple "that I may take pleasure in it and that I may be glorified". The reason why we want God to take first place in our lives is so that **He may be glorified**. This must be our primary motive. Do people see God in our church, in our personal lives?

As we put *first things first*, God will be glorified and we will delight in Him.

Discussion Questions

1. **It has been 2 – 3 weeks since the beginning of 2019. What are some things that you want to thank God for in 2019, so far?** [10 min]

Leader's Notes: This question is meant to prime the members for the rest of this discussion. It will help them open up and thank God for the good things in their lives so far. This question is also meant to be a counterpoint to Question 2: God has been good so far, but are we also experiencing God's discipline in some areas in our lives?

It would be good if the leader could create an environment of thanksgiving while discussing this particular question.

2. **Read Haggai 1:2-4. God drew a contrast between what is being done for God's Temple and their own houses. The Jews got their priorities wrong. Reflect and share on how our choices and actions can sometimes similarly reflect this.** [10 mins]

Leader's Notes: This is a reflect question. The real issue was "self-deception." The Jews had time and resources for their paneled houses but said that "the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord (Hag 1:2)." In verses 5 and 7, God called on them to "consider your ways!" We should ask ourselves the questions: What is my order of priorities? What am I building? Am I a consumer or am I a builder?

Francis Chan observed that "we are quick to rationalise our entertainment and comfort, yet slow to commit to serving God." Members are encouraged to honestly reflect on how this also applies to their lives. The purpose is to help members to identify how and where they fall short, and then to align their hearts to God's.

3. God lovingly disciplines those He loves. Are we currently experiencing God's discipline? Is He showing any of us an area that we need to change into His likeness? [15 min]

Leader's Notes: This question is about discipline and members are encouraged to relate their current struggles. People naturally do not like to talk about discipline. Remind the members that, just like the Israelites mentioned in Haggai 1, God's discipline is not simply about punishment, but may take the form of ineffectiveness when we put our hands to work. Encourage members to share what they are comfortable to share (struggling with studies in the new school year, major roadblocks at work, etc). Also remind members that there is no need to feel ashamed of God's discipline, as He wants us to grow to be more like Him. God's role as a perfect Father has not changed from the Old Testament to the New. From Pro 3:12, we are reminded that God reproves just like a father corrects the son in whom he delights. Oftentimes, what we cannot learn through instruction, God will teach us through experience. God allows us to go through the consequences of our sin-stained decisions and actions so that we can mature into His likeness.

4. Pastor Ernie shared that when we put God first, we will build our spiritual house and our church. Share one practical action you would like to take to build your spiritual house and RiverLife Church. [10 min]

Leader's Notes: This question is meant to prod members to take practical action to rebuilding God's house in our lives and in the church community. Examples could be:

- (For building your spiritual house - See 1Cor 3:16.) Commit to a regular devotional time/prayer time, attending church services and cell regularly, etc.
- (For building your church - See Eph 5:25.) Explore serving in a ministry, get more involved in cell beyond just attending, pray for the church leadership, etc.

Works [10 min]

Let's pray:

1. Every RiverLifer will put first things first: that God will be glorified.

Announcements

1. Water Baptism Class

Sat, 26 Jan | 9am-3pm | Faith Chapel

Register for this class at the Information Counter by Sun, 20 Jan. For enquiries, please contact Clara Tan at 6511 4160 or email her at claratan@riverlife.org.sg. Our next baptism service will be on Sun, 10 Mar.

Church Vision Statement:

“A vibrant family where sons and daughters mature and reveal the Father’s glory from generation to generation.”