

Go Up The Mountain And Get Wood

by Paul Benson

Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Haggai 1:8

If we are going to someday hear Jesus say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” we will need to have actually gotten something done along the lines of His will for our life (a faithful servant does the bidding of his master). Not just works of religious duty, or good ideas about how to help out the world; but *God working through us* to

accomplish His plan. Even though we know God's ability, and we know our call as believers is to reach out in His name, we still have a very real tendency to dismiss any idea of God supernaturally working through us.

Selling Ourselves Short

We have all our lives been subjected to influences of one sort or another which bring about a limitation of what we think we might accomplish in this life. Some from other people in our lives, and some from ourselves. "You could never do that!" and "I could never do that!" and "Don't reach too high, you'll only be disappointed." And too often we will hold up as a standard the life of a person who has accomplished an enormous amount for God and then say, "Hey I can't do that! I'm no Apostle Paul, what do you expect from me?" So we shrink back from the idea of being involved in any kind of Spirit led ministry; stuck in a rut of self imposed inactivity.

But let's forget all of that and look at our personal responsibility in a different light. I believe we can all find good success in service to God by understanding just what it is He wants to accomplish through us, and then seeking the Lord for the grace to do it. To hear God's voice and do His will. This is a matter that requires a growth process; and the more we move in this direction the better we will get at it.

I don't make any claims at being a giant in the things of God or to have any huge accomplishments I can testify to (although I *am* petitioning God for increase and trusting him for the same). I am in the same learning process as everyone else, and have to ward off the same tendencies of self limitation and personal fears that others do. But I have found some things that are working for me. I don't believe I have to accomplish huge things to receive a huge reward. A little here and a little there over the course of a lifetime will bring a mountain of reward in eternity. A little bit at a time is not a frightening standard to set before us; we can all do

that.

But *hearing God's voice* in order to accomplish His will; now that can seem like an insurmountable obstacle. Does God come down and hold a conversation with you each day? He does? Well lucky you! I don't seem to have that kind of thing going for me. Although there have been a few times when I have had God speak to me in conversation (He once, when I was in a real rough stretch, said, "I am with you." so clearly I was soaring for days), I don't always have a hot line to heaven providing two way communication. I have to seek Him in prayer and in His Word. I am so thankful for the way God can, by the anointing of His Spirit, make a passage of Scripture come alive and speak to our needs.

Consider Your Ways

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.
8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I

will be glorified, saith the LORD. 9 Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Haggai 1:7-9

I had the Lord speak to me through this passage in such a personal way once that it seemed as if it had been written for me and me alone. He spoke things into my heart about His will for my life that will be a foundation for every thing I ever do in His name. I would like to share a few of them with you.

The Lord spoke through the prophet Haggai and told the people “*consider your ways*”. Self examination is key to forward progress as a believer. Honestly comparing where we are against where we ought to be can be quite convicting. Getting uncomfortable with where you’re at is good motivation to move ahead. But before we can move ahead we need a vision or goal to work toward, or we will just wander

aimlessly.

Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Boy, did the Lord ever burn that verse into my spirit! And He did so to give me a vision of His will. The setting of the Book of Haggai was just after the nation of Israel had returned from the 70 years of captivity in Babylon their sins had brought upon them. The city of God had been in ruins for years and so had the Temple; but in spite of their given responsibility to rebuild the Temple they were slacking off. They were just worrying about building their own houses and getting their own affairs in order. The Lord was patient with their pursuit of personal prosperity for quite a while but the day came when He moved upon the prophet to speak. He said, “I want my house built!”

We Are God's House

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

Somewhere among all the duties and hustle bustle of Christian life and ministry lies the true focus of the responsibility we carry as believers. Although we have a broad range of ways through which we seek to do His bidding, and an endless list of things we feel He has called us to accomplish; ultimately the purpose and calling of the Body of Christ is to build a habitation for God.

...and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. 9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's

husbandry, ye are God's building. 1 Corinthians
3:8-9

Paul makes three profound statements here in verse 9. First he informs us we are co workers with God. I think most ministers would say they are working *for* God (and maybe they are) not working *with* Him; but I think it would be a lot better working with Him; especially when the load gets heavy. Here, Lord, you carry this burden will ya? If we are filled with His Spirit and motivated by the vision His Spirit brings us then truly we are laborers together with God.

He goes on to say we are God's husbandry. Not a term we use much anymore, particularly if we are city folk. My buddy 'Webster' says husbandry is the management and care of a crop. You are God's crop! There is an aspect of being referred to in that manner which might be a bit offensive to some, but I like it. It says we are His focus. His care is for us, and He is out to nourish us, and watch over His crop; and someday 'harvest' us and take us to His

house to be in turn nourished by us. I like the idea we are His focus. I don't believe God has ten billion projects going on out across the universe. I believe we are His only crop; the sheep of His pasture. His care is for us; I think He cares comparatively little about anything else.

Finally Paul says we are His building. As we saw earlier not just any building. We are the Temple of God. His dwelling place. I am trying to very much keep that in my mind at all times. I am quite ashamed of the many times in the past I have lost sight of that fact and allowed things to come into my life or into my heart that made it a grief for Jesus to live in me. We need to be ever mindful that He dwells in us through the presence of His Holy Spirit; and also how easily the cares and distractions of life can dull us to that reality. No wonder Paul said to *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. (Philippians 2:12)*

He Wants His House Built

Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. The Lord wants His house built, and that house is comprised of people. God help those who have lost sight of the fact that ministry is about people. Not about building organizations, not about building names, not about building buildings, not about promoting social or political change, and definitely not about building a stash of cash!

Seeing God's desire to reach people is key to understanding His plan for you and I, the everyday ordinary Christian. There is no reason to wonder about God's will for your life, or to fret about finding it; it's not some divine mystery out there floating across the cosmos. It can be summed up in one word: people! What does He want from us as believers? He wants us to reach out; to lead people to faith and strengthen the faith of those who do believe. To build His house.

As we lead persons into a life of faith we are increasing the size of God's house. As we build up

and encourage one another in the faith we are strengthening God's house. When we lift up a standard of holiness and exhort ourselves and each other to seek God for the grace to live up to that standard we are cleaning God's house.

A Supply Of Grace

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:15-16

Here the image we are given switches from looking at us individually as His habitation to once again seeing us as the Body of Christ. Corporately we are also God's house; a unified Temple of God. I see something quite remarkable in this segment of Scripture from Ephesians. Notice his observation the body is joined and held together by that which

every joint supplies. Isn't that different?

Have you ever heard someone who was describing the positive attributes of a body focus on the joints? Picture an athlete running a race. Would someone remark, "Hey look at the knees on that guy, he sure can run!"? Or would a man look lovingly at his wife and say, "Ya know honey, you've got some awesome elbows there, you sure are a beauty!"? But that is the emphasis Paul uses in this verse; He talks first of Christ the head, and then joints, and then lastly the body parts. Why is this? Proper order; it would not be proper to put the parts ahead of that which joins them together; the Spirit of God. Remember what we read earlier? *In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

(Ephesians 2:22) Not only is Jesus the Head of the Body; the Spirit of Christ in us is the glue that joins us together.

Notice also that Paul speaks of that which every joint supplies. Who as a follower of Christ hasn't experienced the wonder of finding closeness and

fellowship with a person you have only known a few minutes because of the unifying effect of the Holy Spirit in you both. You don't even know the person but there is a love and unity there like you were lifelong best friends. There is a measure of grace going forth from that 'joint' between you. I love to have those experiences.

In the last part of the passage Paul says if the parts are working effectively there is increase which comes from the strengthening (edifying) quality of the love they share. A very important part of building this habitation for God lies in the simple acts of love shown one to another. The apostle John had been a believer for a good many years when he wrote his letters. He was probably in his late 90's. What deep revelation and great spiritual advice did he have for the Church? How to work miracles? How to baptize properly? Principles of prosperity? No, his advice was so much more important than all of that. Love one another! Want to help build God's house; want to please Him; to glorify Him? Open your heart and show the love of

Jesus to your brothers and sisters in Christ, and to the world. Paul said there is a supply of grace which goes forth and strengthens God's house.

Going After The Good Stuff

Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. He told them to go *up the mountain* to get the wood to build His house. He did not want His house built out of the common wood found down in the valley. God's house deserved better than whatever could be scrounged up in an easy fashion around the outskirts of the city. He wanted it built out of the cedars and firs which grew high in the far away mountains. This was no ordinary wood. The cedar was beautiful in color and it had an awesome fragrance to it; the fir was exceptionally strong. These were the choicest wood to be had but also the most difficult to get. Only the best for God's house.

If you read about Solomon doing the original construction of the Temple it describes an amazing amount of labor involved in traveling to Lebanon, climbing the mountain, felling the trees, hewing the timbers, bringing the wood down the mountain, and then by traversing land and water transporting it to Jerusalem . Thousands upon thousands of laborers were needed to accomplish this feat, all this so that the Lord might have a house built out of the substance of His choice. The strong mountain fir and the beautiful aromatic cedar.

Go up to the mountain. When I think along these lines I remember the rock quarry we used to work as a family years ago. It was basically a steep draw up in the mountains with a rock slide on each side and a road going up the center. You had to park at the bottom and walk quite a ways up the draw to get to where we would work. The road was not fit for a vehicle; only the big old loader we brought the rock out with could handle that draw. Each spring when we would return to work after being shut down for the winter I would dread

that climb up that draw. The road was steep and uneven to walk on. I would have to stop several times and rest to catch my breath. By the time you got up to the work site you almost wished it was time to go home. What a chore! But each day the climb would get a little easier as you got used to the effort involved. After a few weeks you would almost be jogging up the draw; enjoying the exhilaration a good workout gives someone who is in shape. What a difference!

It's quite the same climbing the mountain to get some decent material to build God's house out of today. If you exercise yourself in that area it becomes easier as you go, and can even get to be exhilarating; but if you are out of shape spiritually it's a real chore and quite draining. That's why instead of climbing the mountain of the Lord for material of their own with some anointing to it, most ministers use 'pulpit helps'; sermon outlines of messages preached by others (Ask your 'pastor' how big his library of 'helps' is! Or how much he relies on the resources available on the internet

instead seeking after fresh manna).

Most folks don't realize how common of a practice this is. They have an image in their mind of ministers crying out to God for inspiration; and agonizing in prayer over what to feed the flock on Sunday. But in reality this is seldom true. More often than not they take someone's sermon (maybe Spurgeon this week that ought to work fine) and they spruce it up with some comments of their own, and no one is the wiser (except God and anyone hoping for a message with some anointing to it). Why should I make that agonizing effort to climb the mountain after cedar and fir when I can get away with gathering a bunch of dead branches down in the valley? (Oh, here's some sermons on Revelation. This will make a good series; I'll get five or six Sundays out of these outlines!)

Willing To Pay The Price?

All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The

LORD thy God accept thee. 24 And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver 2 Samuel 24:23-24

When King David was instructed by God to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah, the man offered it to the king as a gift out of respect; even throwing in the oxen to sacrifice and also the wood for the fire. But David would have no part of it. He thought it absolutely unfitting to offer something to the Lord which had cost him nothing. I wonder what kind of messages we would be hearing if all of the folks claiming to be preachers and teachers today had the same attitude as brother David here?

It is quite apparent when someone gets behind a pulpit and has made the climb to get some fragrant material to build with; and (unless you are in a religious slumber) it's also quite apparent when they haven't. And, to bring this bus down the street

you and I live on, the same goes for every aspect of service for Christ. This is where we stop picking on Pastor Sermon-stealer and point the finger at us! You need to hear this and so do I. (Sometimes if no one is around to prod me I have to preach to myself)

Whether its witnessing, exhorting, doing a good deed, or even showing a little love; it can be dead and dry, or have a beauty and a sweet aroma about it I believe there is an aspect of effectiveness in all ministry only found in great personal sacrifice. I have done well in this regard at times and also quite poorly at other times. I have a continual need to be stirred up in the things of God, just like you. We are not here to brag on Brother Paul, but hopefully to figure out what actually gets the house *built*.

Seek And You Will Find

We have been programmed into thinking the anointing of the Spirit is only for somebody

speaking up on a stage or in front of large group of people. This mentality robs us of the drive to seek God for the moving of His Spirit upon our own activities away from the meeting hall. Seeking God earnestly can put a supernatural quality to even the simplest actions. The anointing of God can put more life into a single short sentence than a month full of sermons scrounged up from off the valley floor. The anointing can cause us to use words we don't even realize are just the right ones needed to touch a heart or to make a life changing impact.

One time I was driving up in the woods with a couple of brothers looking at timber to buy. We came across an isolated cabin where some Christian brothers were fasting and praying to hear from God about His work and His will for their lives. In the natural it seemed like just a chance encounter but soon we were sure it was not. As we fellow-shipped with these brethren the Spirit of God came upon us in a powerful way. Suddenly one of our group, out of the blue and having nothing to do with anything we were discussing, loudly

blurted out an obscure segment of Scripture. It seemed totally out of place and caused a minute of awkwardness.

Then the brothers who were staying in the cabin began to shout and praise God. One of them was even dancing around like he had just won the lottery. The Lord had spoken that very segment of Scripture to that brother earlier and they had been discussing it among themselves as to what it meant as far as God's leading. Initially somewhat skeptical, I was quite convinced when the brother opened up his Bible and showed me where a few hours earlier he had written notes in the margin so he would remember later what God had spoken to his heart. I suspect he has never forgotten!

What seemed to us as just another good meeting and some decent fellowship was to these men a divine experience where God heard their prayers and sent someone up to that out of the way cabin to speak a word of confirmation to what they had heard. That brother from our group had also been

fasting and praying to see God work through him; and had the privilege of seeing just a few select words with the anointing of God's Spirit upon them impact some brothers in a life changing manner.

Getting Our Attention

Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Haggai 1:7-9

Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little. If you read this chapter from Haggai it appears God had really been curtailing the flow of His blessing to get the people to a point they would listen to the words of the Prophet. Now there's another concept you don't hear the 'faith teachers' proclaiming. God bringing a time of lack and hardship upon His people as a means of chastening them and bringing them back into line with His will. We hear so many preachers and teachers declare anything negative

or painful is from the Devil; that many have a tendency to rebuke God for dealing with us in this manner.

I wonder if He ever gets tired of being called Satan? I sure would! How would you react if you spanked one of your kids for some misbehavior and they turned on you and said, “I rebuke you Satan, get thou away from me you evil thing!” They might take a few extra licks! But, thank God, our Father corrects us for our own good, and not because He has any problem with anger management.

King David had, through experience, learned the balance of God’s blessing and His Fatherly correction. He knew just like Paul that *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. (Hebrews 12:6)* Reading the Psalms it appears more than once David had been taken to the woodshed. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes... ..and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me. (Psalms*

119:71+75) Notice here he saw this correction as a sign of God's faithfulness, as do I.

Once the pastor of a church I was attending at the time remarked from the pulpit he had heard someone declare, "Boy, God really smacked me a good one." His answer was to reply, "God *does not* smack His children!" I thought, "Man, you must have a different God than I do!" I had to spit that sermon out; it just didn't taste right. Blah! Phew! I heard an old time preacher once say, " Yes, God is a God of love. He loves me so much He holds my hand all the way to the woodshed, and then all the way back again!" Now that's a balance of truth; I can chew that up and swallow it.

Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little.

Maybe if we are in a time of spiritual (or financial) drought we should take a look at our priorities. Maybe God is showing us some of that Fatherly faithfulness, and dealing with us. Maybe we get so dull of hearing we can't discern Him knocking on our spiritual door; so He has to knock

on the physical one.

Out Of Focus?

What is the main focus of our efforts as a believer? What's first and foremost in my life; is it my responsibility to build God's house or the desire to build my own? Boy have I wrestled with that one a few times (and with God's assistance!). But when I genuinely commit to putting God's purposes for my life ahead of my own wishes there is a rest that comes upon me, and a confidence I can count on His provision no matter what things look like.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33

I wonder if Jesus had our passage from Haggai in mind when He spoke those words? He was saying, "Take care of God's business first and everything else will take care of itself. Build my house and I'll look after yours!". May God give us grace to

always put the things of God ahead of the things of self.

The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. Proverbs 11:25

God is wanting us to make the effort to sacrifice our time and energy, and make that climb up the mountain (praying, fasting, studying, waiting on God, crying out for some measure of anointing on our efforts). Then when we reach out with what we receive from God, whatever form it might take, there will be a grace upon it that is beyond what we can give forth of ourselves. There will be a supernatural quality expressed that will touch hearts and lives in a significant way; and not just those we are reaching out to, *but our own selves as well!*

The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself. Proverbs 11:25

He that watereth shall be watered also himself!
The grace we go get from God to give to others
will in turn also be a blessing and edification to us.
I think this is why generous and helpful people are
so much happier than stingy self-centered ones;
they are not just bringing happiness to others but to
themselves also. We can see the same spiritual
benefit by seeking God on the behalf of others.

Go Up The Mountain!

*Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and
build the house; and I will take pleasure in it,
and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.*

What are we building God's house out of today?
Are we going after the costly materials? Are you?
Am I? Is God pleased with what we are building
him? Does anyone even care, or are we just using
whatever is easy to get? Using whatever has no
personal cost to it? Let's be willing to make the
climb to get something strong, beautiful, and

fragrant to build the Lord's house with. Then he will take pleasure in it and be glorified.

Let's go up the mountain and get the good stuff!
Paul Benson