

**The Heart of Worship and Facility Stewardship:  
Haggai's preaching theme—"Give careful thought to your ways"**

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Abstract: Because God desires those who worship in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24), the efficaciousness of one's worship is shaped by the heart attitude. Many elements contribute to the heart of the worshipper. This paper examines the message of the prophet Haggai as he connected the heart attitude of the worshiper with stewardship of the worship facility—the temple.

While there are obvious differences between the temple and present-day church facilities, there are also principles for application. Haggai exhorts the people to "Give careful thought to your ways" by connecting their neglect of the temple with their heart attitude. Specific points of this connection include: 1—time usage; 2—daily lifestyle; 3—obedience to God; 4—living by faith; 5—seeking God's glory; and 6—pursuit of holiness. These points of connection will then be applied to one's heart of worship and stewardship of present-day church facilities.

*"Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD." (Haggai 1:8).*

Worship in spirit and truth—the worship that the Father desires (John 4:23-24). The complexity of the human heart creates an infinite number of dynamics that can contribute or detract from genuine worship. An emphasis on the worship experience over the past few decades has led to a plethora of studies, theories, and practices related to nurturing the genuine heart worship experience. This paper examines an element that may often be overlooked, the relationship between the heart of worship and facility stewardship.

With the abundance of study in this area, one does not want to simply explore another topic that can be indiscriminately added to the list. Therefore, the basis for this examination is the message of the prophet Haggai. He called the people to examine their hearts and lives as related to stewardship of their worship facility—the temple. Then, as a result of studying Haggai's message, one can draw applications related to stewardship of contemporary church facilities.

### **Facility Stewardship in Haggai's Day**

Our knowledge of the prophet Haggai is limited to the contents of his prophecy and two references to his name (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). However, we can infer that he was a messenger of conviction and intestinal fortitude because of the people God called him to serve. Haggai's

contemporaries were content with an unfinished worship facility. They didn't mind that work on God's house had come to a halt. In fact, with a delay of sixteen years, the "Under Construction" signs around the temple mount had become a normal part of the landscape. Haggai preached his message to a complacent people. It's tough enough to mobilize energetic people for a challenging task. It's a far greater challenge needing to also infuse the initial energy. Haggai was up to the challenge as Alden observes:

The brief record of Haggai's ministry does, however, show him as a man of conviction. He has the unique place among the prophets of having been really listened to and his words obeyed. The people did what he preached, and in a mere four years the temple was complete. Though his words were plain and not poetic, he had one major point to make; and he made it forcefully and well.<sup>1</sup>

In 538 B.C. God moved the heart of Cyrus to rebuild the temple of the Israelite people (see chronology chart on page 3). The next two years brought planning and mass mobilization of people and resources to accomplish the task, so that in 536 B.C. the work is initiated. After the foundation was laid the people stopped to praise God and give thanks (Ezra 3:10-13). Soon afterwards, opposition arose from various sources and the work came to a grinding halt (Ezra 4:1-5). *"Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia"* (Ezra 4:24). What had started with such optimism and hope had eroded into failure. The people lost their spiritual edge.

Around a home, necessary repairs can be avoided by quick, functional fixes and maybe some slight life adjustments. For instance, a leaky faucet may initially awake one during the night. But over time, the patterned dripping can become the normal melody during a restful night of sleep. The drips eventually become a steady stream of water and no longer produce a detectable sound. If one can overlook water bill increases, the inconvenience simply becomes part of life.

Such was the case for the returning exiles as they temporarily stepped back from construction on the temple. Initially, they passed by the site with thoughts and dreams for overcoming the opposition and renewing the work to which they had been called. But over time, the unfinished work became the accepted standard.

This continued to the point that the people began to justify their actions, even suggesting that it was just not God's timing for the work to renew. Besides, there was too much work to do on one's own home. After the initial return, individual comforts were secondary to completing God's house. Yet, the delay allowed each one to work towards his own benefit. Then as successive houses were completed, the amount and quality of the finishes escalated. Which in turn prompted the next home builder to set a new personal standard.

## Chronology: Ezra-Nehemiah

Dates below are given according to a Nisan-to-Nisan Jewish calendar (see chart on "Hebrew Calendar," p. 102).

Roman numerals represent months; Arabic numerals represent days.

540 B.C.

	YEAR	MONTH	DAY	EVENT	REFERENCE
530	539 B.C.	Oct.	12	Capture of Babylon	Da 5:30
	538	Mar.	24	Cyrus's first year	Ezr 1:1-4
	537	to Mar.	11		
520	537(?)			Return under Sheshbazzar	Ezr 1:11
	537	VII		Building of altar	Ezr 3:1
510	536	II		Work on temple begun	Ezr 3:8
	536-530			Opposition during Cyrus's reign	Ezr 4:1-5
	530-520			Work on temple ceased	Ezr 4:24
500	520	VI =Sept.	24 21	Work on temple renewed under Darius	Ezr 5:2; Hag 1:14
	516	XII =Mar.	3 12	Temple completed	Ezr 6:15
490					
	458	I =Apr.	1 8	Ezra departs from Babylon	Ezr 7:6-9
		V	1	Ezra arrives in Jerusalem	Ezr 7:8-9
480		=Aug.	4		
		IX =Dec.	20 19	People assemble	Ezr 10:9
		X	1	Committee begins investigation	Ezr 10:16
470		=Dec.	29		
	457	I =Mar.	1 27	Committee ends investigation	Ezr 10:17
	445	Apr.	13	20th year of Artaxerxes I	Ne 1:1
460	444	to Apr.	2		
	445	I =Mar.-Apr.		Nehemiah approaches king	Ne 2:1
		Aug.(?)		Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem	Ne 2:11
450		VI =Oct.	25 2	Completion of wall	Ne 6:15
		VII =Oct. to Nov.	8 5	Public assembly	Ne 7:73-8:1
440		VII =Oct.	15-22 22-28	Feast of Tabernacles	Ne 8:14
		VII =Oct.	24 30	Fast	Ne 9:1
430 B.C.	433	Apr.	1	32nd year of Artaxerxes;	Ne 5:14; 13:6
	432	to Apr.	19	Nehemiah's recall and return	

## Haggai's Message

However, during this time of complacency towards God's house, they also encountered God's corrective discipline in the form of life difficulties. They never had enough food, water, clothing, or money. These providentially ordered difficulties were intended to turn hearts back toward God but the complacency had taken root in hearts so that they could no longer see the connection between their actions and God's ordering of events—they only saw cause for discouragement.

It's in this context that Haggai calls them to take inventory of their lives. Baldwin writes, "Haggai challenges his compatriots to review their experience since they came back to Jerusalem, and to account for their poverty-stricken conditions of living. Disillusionment had set in after the first exhilarating sense of adventure had passed."<sup>3</sup>

The essence of Haggai's message is summarized in 1:8, "*Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD.*" Verhoef explains, "Structurally this verse seems to be without any direct link to the preceding or following verses. It occupies a somewhat independent position. As such it receives special emphasis and conveys the central theme of Haggai's message."<sup>4</sup> Alden suggests, "Everything else in this brief prophecy hangs on this one imperative—build God's house."<sup>5</sup>

As Haggai calls the people to build God's house, he frames the command in the context of reflecting on one's life. In 1:5 he introduces the phrase "Give careful thought to your ways," an exhortation he will repeat throughout the prophecy. Literally, they are to "Set your heart on your ways" (שִׁמּוֹ לְבַבְכֶּם עַל־דְּרֹכֵיכֶם). This phrase calls them to think carefully about what's going on in their lives. "Thought functions may be attributed to the heart. In such cases it is likely to be translated as 'mind' or 'understanding.' To 'set the heart to' may mean to 'pay attention to' or to 'consider important.'"<sup>6</sup>

Various versions translate 1:5 as:

NIV— Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways."

ESV— Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways."

NASB— Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, "Consider your ways!"

NKJV— Now therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!"

KJV— Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; "Consider your ways."

NLT— This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: "Look at what's happening to you!"

Amplified— Now therefore thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways and set your mind on what has come to you."

One use of this phrase should be enough to create a pause for personal heart and life reflection. With four repetitions (including slight variations) in 1:7; 2:15,18 (2) it's clear this is an emphatic cry to "stop your current lifestyle and really look at what's going on." Their lethargy had stopped all life initiatives. We can conclude that their wayward ways had become so commonplace that drastic measures were necessary to get them back on the path.

### **Facility Stewardship Impacting Life in Haggai's Day**

To get back on the right path the people of Haggai's day needed to stop what they were doing, reflect on what was occurring in their lives, and then readjust their thinking. Then, each point of thought readjustment should connect back to the basic command of the prophecy, "*Build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored*" (1:8). This careful life reflection can be manifested in numerous applications, but six points of impact will be briefly surveyed.

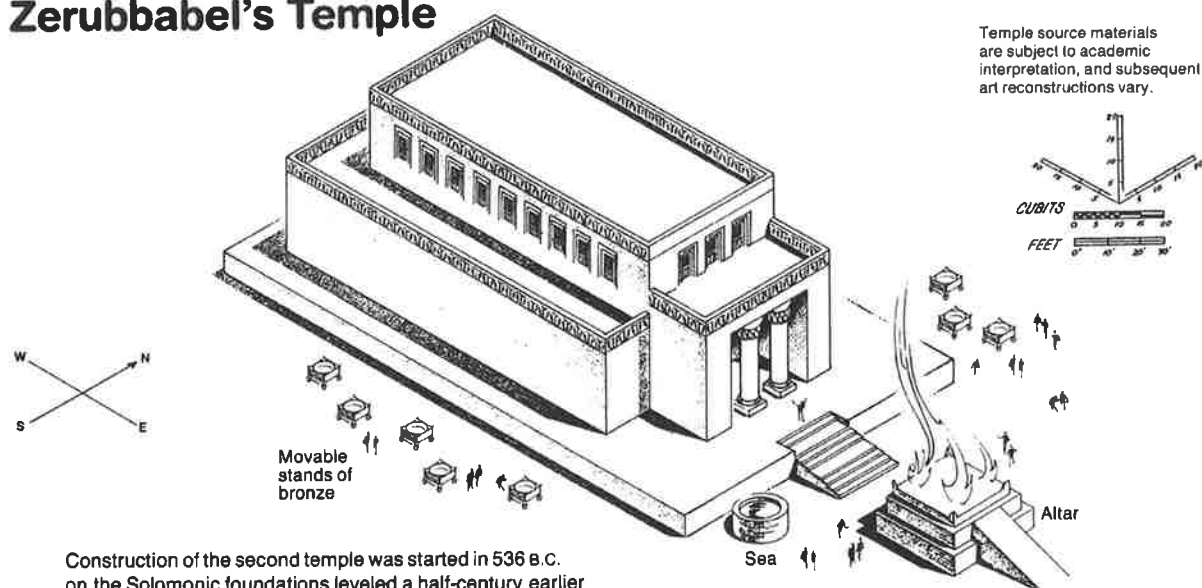
First, lack of facility stewardship impacted their usage of time. The opening actual word of prophecy from God is a rhetorical quote from the people, "*These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built'*" (1:2). When these words were uttered, sixteen years had passed since the laying of the foundation. One begins to wonder, "Just when will be the time?" The people experienced opposition to the building so they stopped working. Then they transferred that opposition into thinking that it was not God's time. However, this prophecy suggests it simply represented obstacles God intended for them to overcome.

Second, we observe an impact on their daily lifestyle—how they're living. The Lord goes on to ask, "*Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin*" (1:4)? It's possible one can excuse their initial stoppage based on God's timing, but that excuse loses credibility when they had enough time to fully care for the finishes of their own homes. The impact on lifestyle is reinforced, "*You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?' declares the LORD Almighty. 'Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house'*" (1:9). God highlights the paneled houses as a basis for comparison with the quality of the temple. This point of impact presents the principle of comparable quality. Namely, the quality of construction and finishes of the place of worship should be comparable to the quality of the homes of the average person.

Third, we observe the impact of simple obedience to God. "*Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozakak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD*" (1:12). The symptoms of lethargy are difficult to fully eradicate so one might assume that excuses continued to abound concerning the timing and/or details of the rebuilding effort. Yet, they overcame any excuses and obeyed the Lord. Some may have struggled with a lack of splendor compared with Solomon's temple (cf Ezra 3:12-13). However, while this temple may not have been as large, God's presence gives it its ultimate significance (see graphic on page 6).

Contrary to appearances the temple's future splendor would be greater than that of the temple of Solomon. The warranty of that rests in the promise of God's divine and gracious presence among his people, and in the manner in which he will intervene in the interest of the temple, causing Gentile peoples to present gifts of "precious things" (2:7) in order to beautify and adorn the house of the Lord.<sup>7</sup>

## Zerubbabel's Temple



Construction of the second temple was started in 536 B.C. on the Solomonic foundations leveled a half-century earlier by the Babylonians. People who remembered the earlier temple wept at the comparison (Ezr 3:12). Not until 516 B.C., the 6th year of the Persian emperor Darius I (522-486), was the temple finally completed at the urging of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezr 6:13-15).

Archaeological evidence confirms that the Persian period in Palestine was a comparatively impoverished one in terms of material culture. Later Aramaic documents from Elephantine in Upper Egypt illustrate the official process of gaining permission to construct a Jewish place of worship, and the opposition engendered by the presence of various foes during this period.

Of the temple and its construction, little is known. Among the few contemporary buildings, the Persian palace at Lachish and the Tobiad monument at Iraq el-Amir may be compared in terms of technique.

Unlike the more famous structures razed in 586 B.C. and A.D. 70, the temple begun by Zerubbabel suffered no major hostile destruction, but was gradually repaired and reconstructed over a long period. Eventually it was replaced entirely by Herod's magnificent edifice.

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Fourth, is a call to live by faith. The return to build the temple resulted from God's moving in the heart of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4). Over the next two years the people moved forward to fulfill the building project—efforts that required obstacles to be overcome. But following the ceasing of construction, their lives were filled with frustrations and daily challenges that threatened basic issues of survival. Haggai 1 repeatedly prods them to consider the extent of those challenges in light of the unfinished temple. Living by sight means working harder and smarter to provide food, clothing, and basic needs. Conversely, living by faith means working harder and smarter to find a way to finish the temple. It means putting aside conventional wisdom to meet needs and believe in God as the ultimate provider—and that He would fulfill His promise to bless them for returning to the work.

Fifth, is an invitation to experience God's glory. In Haggai 2 God asks,

*“Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,” declares the LORD. “Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,” declares the LORD, “and work. For I am with you,” declares the LORD Almighty. . . . “I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the LORD Almighty (Haggai 2:3-4,7).*

Giving attention to the temple structure would open the door to experiencing the glory of God! While this may sound great, it also requires one to lower the priority for paneled houses and personal comforts and give higher priority to the house of God and the place for worship.

Sixth, and finally in this brief survey, care for the temple structure is connected with a pursuit of holiness. Haggai 2 explains that though the people were bringing sacrifices, intended to fulfill the prescription of law and personal purity, their offerings were defiled (2:10-14). Verhoef summarizes,

Haggai establishes the principle, on the basis of the priestly instruction, that ritual purity cannot be passed on by physical contact, whereas ritual defilement can. He applies this principle to the situation of his day: because the people’s attitude toward the temple, and therefore toward the Lord himself, was wrong, their offerings had been unacceptable, and the Lord had not blessed them with good harvests.<sup>9</sup>

The people were unclean because of contact with a dead body, which for them was the dilapidated temple structure. “Their disobedience and sinful negligence in rebuilding the temple were the cause of their defilement and of God’s judgment.”<sup>10</sup>

Having listened to God and examined their lives, the people got the message—and changed their lives. Haggai’s ministry dovetailed with Zechariah’s and over the next four years, the people took up the challenge. By integrating scores of Babylonian texts and new-moon tables calculated from astronomical data that coordinate the old lunar calendar with the Julian calendar, Baldwin offers the following equivalent dates for Haggai and Zechariah’s ministries—accurate to within one day.<sup>11</sup>

Chronological Reference	Equivalent Date	Event Related to Haggai’s Ministry
Haggai 1:1	29 Aug. 520 BC	Haggai’s first message
Haggai 1:15	21 Sept. 520 BC	Work on the temple restarted
Haggai 2:1	17 Oct. 520 BC	Haggai’s second message
Zechariah 1:1	Oct.-Nov. 520 BC	The Word of the Lord to Zechariah
Haggai 2:10	18 Dec. 520 BC	Haggai’s third message

Haggai 2:20	18 Dec. 520 BC	Haggai's fourth message
Zechariah 1:7	15 Feb. 519 BC	The Word of the Lord to Zechariah
Zechariah 7:1	7 Dec. 518 BC	The Word of the Lord to Zechariah
Ezra 6:15	12 Mar. 516 BC	Temple completed

It's reasonable to assume that new obstacles presented themselves as God's work generally faces opposition. However, this time, they kept to the task and God's house was completed!

### **Facility Stewardship Today**

The places we meet for worship and activities as local churches should not be directly paralleled with the temple. Hermeneutical integrity requires us to clearly distinguish between the temple and present-day worship facilities—there are significant theological and functional differences that must be preserved. However, contemporary church buildings are places that we gather for corporate experiences of worship and ministry. And as visible, public identifiers of local churches, we would be wise to consider principles of stewardship related to our worship facilities.

It's true that anywhere that Christians gather can become a sacred space because of the presence of God. Even a dried up bush on dusty soil became holy ground before Moses due to God's presence. But it's also true that the spaces we intentionally plan for worship and ministry present opportunities for the inspiration, or also quenching, of the spirit.

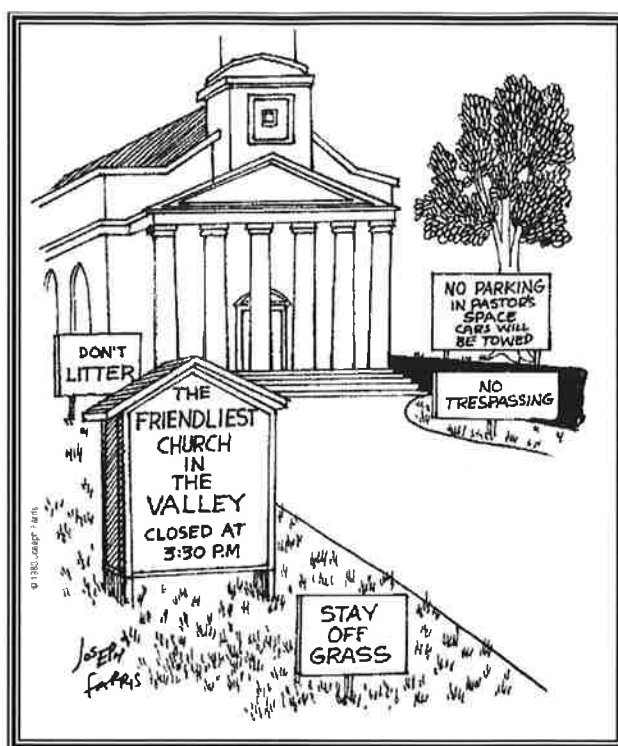
The spaces we occupy have an impact on our lives. Winston Churchill said, "We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us."<sup>12</sup> He was referring to the need to rebuild the House of Commons Chamber which was destroyed during a bombing raid on May 10, 1941. He understood a facility's impact in the hearts and minds of those who occupy the space.

Returning to the impact of ecclesiastical buildings, Rick Warren suggests:

Sometimes the message of the facilities contradicts the message intended by your church. You may be saying, "We're friendly!" but your buildings may be saying, "We're cold and impersonal." You may claim, "We're relevant," but your building may be screaming, "We're fifty years behind the times." It's difficult to project a "we've got it all together" image if your building is falling apart.<sup>13</sup>

The condition and presentation of our facilities says a great deal about our view of God and/or our approach to ministry. What kind of message is being sent by the church in the following cartoon?





14

This dear church claims to be the friendliest church in the valley. And it's possible that it is. But what kind of messages are they sending with their signs? Would you visit this church? Now, obviously this is just a cartoon, and one would like to think that no church would be dumb enough to display a similar collection of cold and repelling signs. But there are messages that our facility sends that scream even louder than these signs.

### Contemporary Application of Haggai's Message

As in Haggai's day, we should give careful thought to our ways. Our facilities are sending theological and practical messages about God and our heart of worship. It's also true that we can become oblivious to these messages. When we enter a space for the first time, we notice the abnormalities. But as we grow accustomed to our own spaces, we quickly lose objectivity—and those abnormalities disappear from our minds. This fact combines with well-intentioned overlooking of facility shortcomings. We would like to think we are not so petty as to allow problems with a building to drive us away from a church. In addition, we recognize the blessedness and grandeur of North American church facilities compared with many parts of the world. All these factors combine and we continue to overlook growing problems.

Then, as facility problems compound and continue to be justified, the condition quickly deteriorates—and not just the building, **but the hearts of the people**. Or perhaps a church initiated a facility renewal project only to encounter obstacles that ceased the efforts. Either way, the calloused hearts parallel those of Haggai's day. This condition presents homiletical

motivation to preach the book of Haggai as Keil's description might easily apply to contemporary churches,

As soon as they found themselves disappointed in their expectations, they became idle and indifferent with regard to the house of the Lord. And the addresses of our prophet show clearly enough, that one principal reason for the suspension of the work is to be sought for in the lukewarmness and indifference of the people.<sup>15</sup>

So if facility shortcomings can be easily overlooked and lead to lethargy, we should heed Haggai's exhortation to "give careful thought to our ways." This can be accomplished by carefully and objectively scrutinizing our church buildings. Here are a few ways to look at your building with clear eyes:

- **Recall your first days at the church.** When you first visited the church, your objectivity was fresh. Think back to your first impressions.
- **Ask your spouse.** Men and women notice different things, so tour the building with your spouse.
- **Prayerfully walk around the building by yourself.** The church building seems a much different place when no one else is there. The quiet moments in prayerful reflection may enable the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to an entirely new idea.
- **"Visit" the church with a friend who's never been there.** A true visitor to the church will have a completely fresh perspective. Also, asking a non-Christian for his perspective may open your eyes to the facilities—and Lord willing, his eyes to the gospel.<sup>16</sup>

Employing these approaches, the following survey of twelve questions probes specific details of a church building. These questions are grouped in three categories: Facility Flow, Facility Function, and Facility Care.

### **Facility Flow:**

1. As you drive up and look at the front of the church, do you feel welcomed? Curb appeal matters to churches as much as real estate transactions. Potential visitors to your church will likely drive by your church before actually attending—either in person or on the internet. If your front façade is unappealing, they may not be back. And in case you try to hide the appearance by lack of pictures on your website, visitors can check it out through the various aerial and street-view picture sites available.

Obviously curb appeal is a subjective factor and different appearances will draw people in different ways. The key is to match the church's DNA with the first impressions from the appearance of the building. A grand brick entrance with large columns conveys a more formal setting and fits a stronger liturgical church, that instills a sense of God's presence and awesomeness. Conversely, a large glassed atrium with a culturally-neutral feel might appeal to unchurched people. Actually, either kind of appearance can be appealing if done well and it remains consistent with the church's DNA.

2. Can you easily identify where to enter the parking lot and the building? If people cannot easily identify entry points, they will feel uneasy before they get into the building. And an uneasy visitor automatically becomes more skeptical of each element of your service—simply because of the uneasiness. Think about the first time you entered your church building. Are there exterior indicators highlighting the entrance? Maybe it's a raised roof or additional windows around the doors. If your options to change the entrance are limited, tasteful signage can help indicate the entrance.

Also, consider if your church has a “secret entrance,” a less public, but much more convenient access. The enlightened regular attenders gravitate toward that entrance. Whereas the newcomer will choose the less convenient, but more clearly indicated main entrance. Now, if the visitor sees others using the secret entrance, then he will feel alienated before even stepping foot into the building.

3. Can you find a parking space within a reasonable distance from where you will enter the building? Parking is a “negative point” issue—you will probably only discuss the details if something needs corrected. It takes lots of land, money, upkeep, and depending on your church's size, may require numerous staff to coordinate circulation patterns. And all that for something that doesn't feel like a ministry issue. However it is something most churches need to address—even if it's to integrate public transportation issues.

Churches need adequate parking within a reasonable distance from the clearly indicated entrance. That includes handicapped parking and you may want additional spaces reserved for expecting moms and families with babies. If parking is especially tight, some churches have begun a valet service. The spaces reserved for “visitors” may or may not work depending on your specific situation. One option is to try communicating to your regular attenders to leave open the spaces next to handicapped spaces. Since they're not labeled, visitors can stay anonymous while letting them feel success at finding a prime parking space.

4. Upon entering the building can you figure out where to go next? Lack of direction upon entering the building creates circulation confusion. And the longer it takes one to figure out the circulation pattern, the more discomfort builds. At a former church, our primary entrance leads to an eventual dead end. Upon returning to the entrance, one faces a split set of stairs with closed doors at the end of each. A small sign on the wall is not enough to show people where to go next. This circulation took me a while to navigate and I worked at the church—I often wondered how visitors found their way. Sometimes confusing circulation patterns evolve from additions or renovations over the years without a clear plan for the future.

Clear and tasteful signs build trust. They tell a visitor, “We're upfront with you and won't try to trick you.” Human greeters help, but some visitors want to remain anonymous until they're ready to trust you. And don't just tape a paper sign to the wall. Elaborate signs can get expensive, but a handwritten, paper sign with curling corners will negate any positive from having a sign in the first place. Especially with today's technology, tasteful and clear signs can be produced economically.

5. Does the building welcome, or frustrate, special needs people? The American Disabilities Act has radically impacted all facilities with: wider access, ramps, restroom renovations, elevators, and handicapped parking. When churches are considering changes to their facility it often includes a discussion about updating for handicapped accessibility. Everyone agrees it should be a priority, but sometimes appeals are quickly made to “grandfather clauses” as excuses to avoid expenses.

However, as a defender of all life, shouldn’t the church lead the way in welcoming people with disabilities? While it’s understandable to attempt keeping expenses to a minimum, there can be economical solutions implemented or at least planned for as part of renovations. Most churches claim to be welcoming of all people and that anyone is welcome regardless of their past. But if a church is not welcoming of people with physical disabilities (though most public buildings are handicap friendly) they send very cold messages to those with spiritual disabilities—those who “fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

### **Facility Function:**

6. Does the facility appear up-to-date and appropriate with today’s culture? This addresses the overall aesthetics and appropriateness of appearance and finishes. And there are two facets of cultural connectedness, 1—décor; and 2—technology.

First is décor—which prompts a couple of questions. What is really necessary? How nice does the space need to be as long as it’s functional? To answer these questions, we can apply Haggai’s principle of comparable quality as it relates to our culture—which is no different than missionaries taking the Gospel to an unreached part of the world. If we ministered in a culture with few buildings of any kind, then wall and floor colors or materials wouldn’t matter much. However, people in North America have a cultural expectation of public buildings. If the décor harkens to a long-past decade, visitors perceive the church as out-of-touch. We may claim to have relevant teaching from God’s Word, but the out-of-date aesthetics suggest we don’t know what “relevant” really means.

The second facet deals with technology. Full articles could survey the spectrum of audio, video, lighting, security, communication, information, and computer technologies. It doesn’t take long to spend a great deal of money—and for equipment that might become obsolete quickly. However, that can also be a good thing because that great advancement that is too expensive now, may become affordable in six months. When evaluating technological issues for the church, Schultze offers sound thinking, “My thesis is that *liturgical* wisdom (i.e., wisdom about how to plan, order, and conduct worship) should direct how we employ presentation technologies [emphasis original].”<sup>17</sup>

7. Do your impressions of the various spaces match up with the intended use? Considering the investment required to build ministry space, flexibility is very important. But ministry spaces should only share spaces after carefully examining the degree of compatibility. For example, a fellowship space designed as a welcoming “hangout” place for adults may also work for high school gatherings. While teenagers ideal space might look a little different, if the adult space is done well, it might also work for teens. On the other hand, if you put a high school crowd in a children’s ministry space with its bright colors and graphics of trucks and flowers, they will feel insulted, having been treated like kids.

Now, every church must go through times of temporary arrangements—sometimes logistics just necessitate that people are in a space that isn't the best suited for them. But all too often, temporary arrangements can turn into semi-permanent arrangements. The key is to make sure that temporary arrangements remain temporary.

8. Based on the facility, will visitors perceive they will meet people with whom they can connect? Would you? People today are looking for some form of connection. They just want to fit in with some affinity group. That's why there are so many social networking websites through Facebook, Twitter, and other connections via technology. At one time, churches used to be the place of community activity and involvement—not just the center of spiritual life, but of community life. Even if people were not regular attenders, they knew the hours of church services. The doors were never locked so anyone could come at anytime for prayer or personal reflection with God. They would willingly wander into the fellowship hall of the church because that's where various social or community functions occurred so they were familiar with those spaces. This was similar to New Testament times, where the temple courts bustled with community life.

However, today the risks of vandalism and other security issues force churches to deadbolt their doors. When people are struggling in life, they cannot just go to the church building to meet with God. As a result, people found new places for community connection, often in the local coffee shop or café. Perhaps it's time to reverse this trend and provide community connection spaces in our churches that are more easily accessible. Let's pull the fellowship hall from the back or the basement and put it near the main entrance and communicate to visitors that they are welcome.

### **Facility Care:**

As previously noted, present-day church facilities are not the temple. However, since church facilities are the places we worship God and carry out ministry, should there be a standard of care and upkeep that they represent? What does it say about our view of God when our ministry facilities lack care, upkeep, and replacement fixtures when needed? The next three survey questions address the care of a facility and often each one can be addressed with minimal cost.

9. Does the facility look clean? Think about any space you visit. If it's dirty or messy, are you likely to return? Think about the message communicated by cobwebs, dusty surfaces, stains on the carpet, water marks on the ceiling, moldy foods in the refrigerator, toys in the nursery that haven't been cleaned in a while, etc. As a rule-of-thumb the spaces that should receive the most attention are the nursery and the women's restroom—while all restrooms have value, typically women are affected more by a dirty restroom than men.

However, messiness is more than just cleaning up the dirt. Rather, it really can be a general stewardship issue for anyone in our churches. How much effort does it take to pick up the gum wrapper on the floor or the week old communion cup that was simply missed by the cleaning team? If a garbage can is overflowing, couldn't someone empty it—or take the initiative to find out the procedure? This may include a change in thinking, but it reflects a zeal for God's house highlighted by Haggai's message.

10. Does the facility look in good repair and maintained? This question includes all the general repair and maintenance items at a church. Sometimes it will require some money and therefore there should be a regular budget item to cover normal upkeep. The amount budgeted will vary greatly, but it should be large enough to allow at least one major repair or update per year—and more if the facility is older. The reality is that furnaces and air conditioners need upkeep; walls need painted; roofs and flooring need to be replaced periodically.

In good years when repairs are minimal then these funds can be combined to address larger capital projects. While it may not be enough to cover all major expenses, it will provide the seed money to be good stewards of God's house. One church I pastored did not have a capital maintenance fund. So one summer when some extra funds were available, we gave a \$5,000 gift to a Bible college that needed a new roof. Then in the fall our trustees determined we could no longer repair our own roof, so we had to start a new fund raising campaign. It took a year and half (and 2 more winters) to raise the money to replace the roof. While I'm glad we sent money to help the Bible college's roof fund, we sure could have used some of the money for our own roof needs.

11. Does the facility look orderly? A church may have a couple different people or ministries sharing a desk or even a full office. Over time each group stakes their ground or their own spot on the desk. Each one may know where to find his or her own materials, but to the casual attendee, it just looks like a cluttered desk.

Most churches claim they need more storage. However, many times the existing storage rooms need organizing and space reprioritized. Church storage rooms are often home to things people want to get rid of but hesitate to throw away because of initial or perceived value. So they think, "I'll give it to the church!" Then, those items collect dust in the storage rooms because people do not want to offend the "giver" by throwing them away.

12. Has the facility become an obstacle to ministry—in flow, function, care, usage, or because of debt or other factors? If a church does not exercise good facility stewardship they can end up with a building that becomes an albatross and a hindrance to ministry. This can occur to old buildings that have not been maintained so become too expensive to repair or too antiquated to improve. This can also occur at newer buildings or additions where the construction process got out of hand and the church incurred more debt than it could handle. There are solutions for these situations, but the better scenario is to practice good facility stewardship along the way.

### **Facility Stewardship Impacting Life Today**

Having carefully scrutinized facility weaknesses, one will begin to expose conditions or possible projects to be addressed. But, simply identifying weaknesses still falls short of correcting those issues. Knowing what to do is not the same as completing the task. However, implementing facility change initiatives will surface new leadership challenges. Addressing those possible challenges is beyond the scope of this paper, but Haggai does offer some points of application when confronting those leadership challenges—even as they provided direction for the temple project.

1. Time usage. Implementing necessary facility change initiatives will require time and effort—not just to complete actual projects but also time working with people to implement change. Since churches often change at the speed of glaciers, it becomes tempting to quench projects suggesting that “It’s just not God’s time.” In some cases that may be true. But in other circumstances, it just becomes an excuse to continue the status quo.
2. Daily lifestyle. When approaching a facility project, one quickly encounters the decision regarding the quality and scope of proposed changes. At the two ends of a continuum are quality and humility, each of which can be supported biblically. Proponents of quality suggest that God deserves the best of everything and they point to the finishes in the temple, tabernacle, and various worship elements. Supporters of the humility view point to crude and limited facilities for churches in many parts of the world, so we should limit effort and expense on our church buildings. As in Haggai’s day, the principle of comparable quality offers a solution. When determining the quality of finishes for a church facility, one should consider the home of the average church attender and the public facilities in the area.
3. Obedience to God. Sometimes projects are delayed out of simple issues of obedience with the dominant excuse concerning money. While many elements of facility stewardship cost little or no money, larger scale projects may require significant financial sacrifice. This subject becomes even more taboo during difficult economic times. However, God often specializes in providing during unlikely circumstances. This does not suggest churches should go into debt beyond reasonable levels for healthy churches. Rather, it’s a simple call for churches to submit to God’s leading as an act of obedience. This obedience is connected to the next area of impact.
4. Living by faith. As in Haggai’s day, the decision to go forward with facility improvements probably includes many unknowns. Obedience in spite of the unknowns is faith. And the greatest steps of faith will rest on the shoulders of the pastoral staff. During most building projects, there comes a point when I challenge the pastor(s) with an earnest charge, “Are you ready to lead through this process?” The acts of faith required often include elements of personal risk, personal commitments, overall influence issues, and/or the willingness to step to the front lines for spiritual attack.
5. Seeking God’s glory. When a church has demonstrated faith and obedience by embarking on a facility improvement, it’s often accompanied with a desire to experience more of the glory of God. As we gather for worship we invoke God’s presence and the descent of the Spirit. Regardless of worship style, traditional, contemporary, or blended, a common thread includes a passionate call for God to dwell in the midst. Recalling Churchill’s words—“We shape our buildings and after that they shape us”—improved environments allow an inspired invoking of God’s presence and glory.
6. Pursuit of holiness. When one prepares for company to visit, there is an earnest effort to clean the house. The larger the gathering or event, the greater the preparation efforts—all as demonstration of the value of those visiting. How much more should our invoking of God’s presence at worship inspire a quality of the spaces where we gather for worship and ministry? God is a most worthy guest, whether He’s present as the object of our worship or the enabler of ministry to occur.

## Conclusion

Haggai preached to a people who cared more for their own homes than for the house of God. Their hearts had drifted from God and they became lukewarm and lethargic to spiritual matters. By their connection with a deficient worship space, their sacrificial offerings were defiled and unacceptable in God's sight. To call them back, God caught their attention through life difficulties related to basic necessities. The people followed Haggai's message and as a result, God promised blessing. Utilizing a double allusion to his characteristic phrase in 2:18, "Give careful thought," God emphasizes, "*From this day on I will bless you*" (2:19).

Similarly, the principle of blessing can be experienced by churches that pursue facility stewardship in an effort to honor God. The following are accounts of two very different churches that experienced God's blessing through facility stewardship.

First is a suburban Chicago church that transitioned from a traditional church that had slipped into stagnation and decline into a seeker-focused, missional church. The change included dramatic transformations of the interior spaces into "immersed environments" intended to impact the unchurched. Despite the interior improvements and energized ministry, the exterior still screamed the message of a traditional, stagnated church and major problems remained for circulation and parking. So the church took the step of faith and put their building on the market at the bottom of the real estate collapse. While they talked about faith, most believed it would take a year or even multiple years before they had a reasonable offer. God intervened as they received a quality offer within 24 hours and within a couple of weeks sold the building for a very good price. They are now riding the wave of God's presence and leading for their new facility as it helps launch their vision of outreach to the next level.

A second church is from rural Illinois where it's the only evangelical church for many miles. The pastor led the way to construct phase one of its first building, which was a basement level as they met in the main room with a kitchen and classrooms. Ministry energy flowed until God called home that pastor after a battle with cancer. Passion ceased for the next phase of construction and it became known as the "Basement Church." A few years of confusion and inconsistent leadership ensued. Following the call of a new pastor, God caught their attention through leaks to the temporary roof. Some suggested simply putting a conventional roof on the basement and making due as it was—somewhat symbolic of what had happened spiritually as dreams for a complete facility had died. But God's Spirit inspired hearts for an expanded facility plan that took faith and courage during lethargic times. The result was God's provision for a new roof that complemented the new entrance and fellowship area addition. And perhaps more importantly the church experienced a renewal of God's presence and leading as they look forward to future phases of construction.

These kinds of blessings can occur when churches pursue facility stewardship. But perhaps the greatest blessing is the development of a pure heart that is passionately seeking God—***a heart that can worship in spirit and truth.***



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- <sup>1</sup> Robert L. Alden, *Haggai* The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 572.
- <sup>2</sup> *The Bible Visual Resource Book*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1989), 93. Information from *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985).
- <sup>3</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction & Commentary TOTC* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 37.
- <sup>4</sup> Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 64.
- <sup>5</sup> Alden, *Haggai*, 569.
- <sup>6</sup> Andrew Bowling, s.v. **חַגַּי** *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, & Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press 1980), vol. 1:467.
- <sup>7</sup> Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 40.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Bible Visual Resource Book*, 95.
- <sup>9</sup> Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, 114.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., 136.
- <sup>11</sup> Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 29.
- <sup>12</sup> Winston Churchill, House of Commons, October 28, 1943.  
<<http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/quotations>>
- <sup>13</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message & Mission*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 265.
- <sup>14</sup> Joseph Farris, "Friendly? Church," *Building Church Leaders*.  
<<http://www.buildingchurchleaders.com/multimedia/cartoons/15064.html>>.
- <sup>15</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets, Vol. 10 of Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* by C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans. By James Martin, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprint 1986), 171.
- <sup>16</sup> James Rodgers, "Blind Spots: Why we sometimes can't see problems with our facility," *Leadership Journal* (Fall, 2009), 45.
- <sup>17</sup> Quentin J. Schultze, *High-Tech Worship? Using Presentation Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 14.