

Haggai: A Prophet for Revival

Theme
Promoting Revival

Scripture
Haggai 1–2

Memory Work
Haggai 1:9

Objectives

Knowledge: You should understand—

1. the historical setting of Haggai's prophecy.
2. that self-centeredness obstructs God's work.
3. that the reasons we give for our spiritual failures are worthless excuses.
4. that God's presence overcomes human limitations.

Application: You should respond by—

1. letting disappointment drive you to evaluate your priorities.
2. confessing your sins rather than attempting to justify them.
3. taking whatever action God requires of you.
4. regarding God's chastening as a deterrent to future sin rather than as a sign of rejection.

Lesson Outline

- I. Dealing with Disobedience
 - A. Exposing excuses
 - B. Pointing out the price
 - C. Calling for contemplation
 - D. Advocating action

- II. Reassuring the Revived
 - A. The promise of God's presence
 - B. The fact of God's forgiveness
 - C. The vision of God's victory

Old Testament Prophecy

Approach to the Lesson

❖ **Theme** Recognizing revival is easier than defining it. The English word *revival* signifies a bringing back to life. But we cannot speak of bringing Christians back to life without raising a crucial question: in what sense can a Christian die? Does being in Christ not provide an eternal escape from spiritual death? Perhaps the best way to understand revival is not to think of it as bringing a Christian back to life but rather as bringing life back into one's Christianity. It is possible for the life-giving influence of God's Spirit within a Christian's heart to wane as a result of indifference or disobedience. Revival is a cleansing from sin and a restoration of fellowship with God and the fullness of His Spirit.

Some people think of revival as mass conversions. But a sinner cannot be revived; he or she has never been "vived" (i.e. made alive) in the first place. True revival always *results* in the salvation of the lost, but it does not *consist of* mass conversions. Revival is for Christians, and when Christians get revived, their influence draws sinners to Christ. No Christian will question the need for mass conversions today. In fact, it seems that the only hope for avoiding national calamity is that God might bring masses of people to sincere repentance. But the history of revivals teaches that mass conversions do not take place as long as Christians are content to wallow in their sins. Christians who sincerely long for revival will long for it first in their own hearts. The longing for personal revival need never be disappointed, for even if God does not grant large-scale revival to this generation, He is always ready to revive those individuals who place their lives wholly at His disposal.

❖ **Background** Haggai is the first of the postexilic prophets. Zechariah, Malachi, and he prophesied to the remnant of Judah restored to the land following the Babylonian captivity. These people, though purged by God's chastening from the deepest sins of their ancestors, nevertheless had spiritual problems. You will recall from your study of Ezra and Nehemiah (Lessons 3 and 4) that the spiritual leaders of this remnant sometimes had to take stern measures in dealing with the people's sins. In Haggai's days, Jeshua (or Joshua) led the people in the capacity of high priest, Zerubbabel in the capacity of governor (as near as Israel could come to a king in those days under Persian domination), and Haggai and Zechariah as prophets (Ezra 5:1-2).

The first returning remnant of Judah arrived in its homeland about 538 B.C. with a mandate from King Cyrus (and ultimately from God) to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The first four chapters of

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Revival This Week!

It is not unusual for churches to announce that they are going to have a revival. Often, however, there is no real understanding of what revival really is. We do not just decide we are going to have a revival. As this lesson states, "revival signifies a bringing back to life." Since life is a gift from God, only God can breathe fresh life back into our Christianity and revive us.

Many Christians have the mistaken idea that if they just do the right things they can produce a revival. They treat the work of God like a recipe or scientific formula. Given the proper ingredients, the end result will be what they want.

Encourage the members of your group not to fall into the thinking that revival is dependent upon them. It is the sovereign work of God. Believers should, however, desire and pray for revival. In light of this, have the members of your group read Psalm 80. This is a model prayer for those who wish to pray for God to revive His work. As you read through this prayer together, note its natural divisions. They occur at verses 3, 7, and 19. Three times the psalmist repeats his prayer, "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."

Point out to the members of your group that there is a subtle change in each of these refrains. Ask whether they can point it out. The change is in the titles of names that the psalmist uses for God. In verse 3, he refers to Him as God, a more general term. In verse 7, He is God of hosts. The "hosts" refers to the armies of heaven, the angels, and signifies God's majestic power. In verse 19, the psalmist uses LORD God of hosts. To the earlier title he has added God's proper name, reflected in the English by the word LORD, Jehovah. This indicates an increasing intensity in the prayer. Encourage the participants in your group to become increasingly serious and intense in their praying for revival and to use Psalm 80 as their guide.

Ezra record this event, along with the opposition that arose against the construction. Ezra 4 closes with a note that this opposition brought the work to a halt until the second year of Darius, which was about 520. At that time, Ezra recounts, Haggai and Zechariah arose as prophets, stirring up the people to resume work on the temple. Ezra does not record the content of Haggai's preaching; he says only that the prophets helped those who carried out the work (5:2).

Turning from Ezra's historical record to Haggai's prophecy, we can see clearly the role that the prophet played. The Lord used Haggai to point out the people's failure, rebuke them for it, and call them to action. The people's obedience constituted revival. No prophet ever enjoyed such immediate and complete success in his preaching. When the people moved forward at God's command, God then used Haggai to reassure them that He was with them and that they could expect continued success as they continued His work.

Haggai's prophecy consists of four simple messages. Each message begins with a statement that God's Word came to the prophet on a particular date, specifying the month, the day, and the year (1:1; 2:1, 10, 20). These four messages spanned a period of only four months in the year 520 B.C. Unlike most of the other prophets, who used poetry, Haggai's preaching is recorded in prose. Therefore, its strength lies not in the forceful imagery and artistic arrangement that characterizes Hebrew poetry, but in the directness with which it addresses the people's problems and prescribes the only remedy. Though Haggai does not rise to heights of literary eloquence, his preaching is no less powerful than that of the other prophets. In fact, measured in terms of listener response, Haggai's preaching was the most powerful of all. But, of course, Haggai's words are God's Word, and God alone deserves the glory for how His people responded then and for how we respond today.

I. Dealing with Disobedience

Haggai's first and lengthiest message (ch. 1) focuses attention on the people's disobedience to God's mandate, given eighteen years earlier, to rebuild the temple. In promoting revival, one must always begin by addressing whatever sin obstructs the fullness of God's blessing.

Exposing excuses The people's failure to make progress toward reconstructing the temple was not a matter of outright rebellion. They had made a good-faith attempt to rebuild, but their efforts had been thwarted by the schemes of those who opposed the project. Once the project came to a halt, inertia set in, and the people

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My Favorite Preacher

Point out to your group the following statements from the lesson: "Unlike most of the other prophets, who used poetry, Haggai's preaching is recorded in prose. Its strength lies not in the forceful imagery and artistic arrangement that characterizes Hebrew poetry, but in the directness with which it addresses the people's problems and prescribes the only remedy. Though Haggai does not rise to heights of literary eloquence, his preaching is no less powerful than that of the other prophets."

From these statements we learn that different styles of communicating God's Word have been around for a long time. In a similar thought, the author of Hebrews informs us that God "at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" (Heb. 1:1). God chose to communicate in different ways by different communicators, and He still chooses different types and styles of communicators for the exposition of His revelation today.

Ask the members of your group to think of their favorite preacher and the reason he is their favorite. Some may like Evangelist Smith or Dr. Brown or Pastor Jones. Often people like preachers for different reasons. Some like preachers who are deep in their theology. Others like those who tell interesting stories to illustrate their messages. Whatever the case may be, the fact is that we all have our favorites. The danger comes, however, not in having a favorite but in despising other ministers who do not preach like our hero.

Think about Haggai. He may not have been as eloquent as Malachi, and he certainly did not record visions as interesting and strange as Zechariah, yet he faithfully proclaimed God's Word.

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were content to do nothing. The political situation had changed little over the previous two decades, and they felt certain that any further effort to rebuild would quickly come to naught. The sacrifices were being offered (Ezra 3 records the rebuilding of the altar and the establishment of the basic temple services in 538), and the reconstruction of the actual building must have seemed relatively unimportant. Whenever the subject came up, the people's response was, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built" (1:2). No doubt they felt that the time would come eventually, but they saw no reason to think that it had come already.

The Lord saw the situation from a different angle altogether. The claim that the time was not right was simply an excuse for inaction. The condition of the people's hearts was evident from the fact that they had made their own homes quite comfortable. A "paneled" house (v. 4) is one with paneled walls. The people's eagerness to furnish their own houses with a measure of luxury while being content to let the temple lie in ruins (v. 9) revealed their lack of commitment to the Lord and to His work. Then, as now, self-centeredness was the rule of the day.

- ❖ There is something seriously wrong with a child of God who is more intent upon feathering his or her own nest than upon advancing the Lord's work. Any reason given to justify this kind of living is a worthless excuse. We might convince ourselves that our behavior is reasonable, but, in God's eyes, putting self first is never legitimate.

Pointing out the price Self-centeredness never pays. On the contrary, it costs dearly. The people had managed to panel their homes, but they could not keep themselves adequately fed and clothed (vv. 5-11). The problem was not that they were lazy, for they worked hard at sowing seed, making clothing, and earning wages; nevertheless they remained destitute of daily necessities (v. 6). This destitution was no accident; the Lord had withheld the things they worked so hard to obtain in order that He might get their attention (vv. 9-11).

Calling for contemplation Haggai 1 contains two commands from the Lord. The first of these commands appears twice (vv. 5, 7): "Consider your ways." *Consider* is the translation of a Hebrew phrase that literally means to set one's heart upon something. The Lord is not calling for a casual evaluation; He wants His people to engage in some serious soul searching. They must carefully evaluate how they have behaved over the past eighteen years and why they have behaved that way. The Lord has already formed His evaluation

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Faithful preaching of holy Scripture must be the standard by which we judge ministers. In our consumer-oriented society we tend to gravitate only to what we like and despise everything else as inferior. Caution your group not to do this with preaching, listening only to what they like and ignoring what they don't like. It's true, one preacher may not be as smooth in his presentation as another, and perhaps the pastor at your old church preached "deeper" sermons than your current pastor, but you must never despise the faithful preaching of God's Word, no matter how well or how poorly the preacher performs.

Self-Centeredness

The lesson points out that "in God's eyes, putting self first is never legitimate." Self is one of the greatest hindrances that exist to the work of God.

When the exiles returned to the Promised Land, God blessed them greatly. They lived in homes with paneled walls. God had given them some amount of riches, but rather than use them, they abused them.

The Bible has a great deal to say about wealth, possessions, and self-centeredness. Have the members of your group look up the following references to these three inter-related topics and give a brief summary of each verse's teaching:

which is infallible. The people must now reconsider how they have viewed their deeds and motives and conform their views to God's view.

❖ When unexpected disaster or disappointment strikes a Christian, he should not chalk it up to coincidence and redouble his labors in order to recover, oblivious to the Lord. Instead, he should consider his ways to see whether the Lord is trying to call attention to sin in his life. Not all affliction is the result of sin (Job is proof of this fact), but when God chastens us, He reveals His reasons for doing so, just as He did in Haggai's day.

Advocating action The second command of Haggai 1 is a call to action (v. 8). Once the people have contemplated the situation and adopted God's view of it, the only thing left to do is to get busy. They must bring wood and build. This is the point to which the previous three steps in dealing with sin ultimately lead. It would do the people no good to admit their excuses, recognize the price they have paid for their disobedience, and adopt God's viewpoint toward their failure if they did not act to correct the situation. God was looking for more than good intentions; He expected performance. The people responded precisely as God wished. The people feared the Lord and obeyed His voice through the prophet (v. 12). In just over three weeks the work on the temple had resumed. What a refreshing difference from pre-exilic times, when the prophets met with scorn or indifference! Pleased with this response, the Lord spoke again through Haggai, giving this simple message: "I am with you" (v. 13). And indeed He was, for the next verse records that the Lord stirred up the whole nation to move forward with the work of reconstruction. Having dealt with the people's disobedience, the Lord graciously granted them revival.

❖ Most Christians go through periods of spiritual lethargy, sometimes lengthy ones. Like a sailboat on a windless sea, they do nothing but wallow in the waves of disobedience, doubt, and discouragement. But God does not remain silent forever. Eventually He speaks, and when the Christian responds properly, he feels as if the breeze has freshened once again. His sails fill out, and he moves forward with joyful purpose in the Lord's work. This is revival, and it will come when God knows we are ready for it. We can hasten that time by keeping ourselves before the Lord, seeking His guidance and renewal, trusting Him to deal with our disobedience.

II. Reassuring the Revived

The Lord's assistance to the people did not end with their revival. God does not intend revival to be a short-lived experience,

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1. First Samuel 2:7—Possessions are a gift from God.
2. Psalm 37:16; Proverbs 15:16; 16:8—It is better to be poor and holy than wealthy and wicked.
3. Matthew 6:19-21—Store up eternal treasure in heaven rather than temporary treasure on earth.
4. Mark 4:19—Riches can turn your heart from spiritual things.
5. Second Corinthians 5:15—Because of what Christ has done for us, we should seek to live Christ-centered lives.

Encourage the participants to write down these references and during each day of the coming week pray over one of the passages. By taking these verses to the Lord in prayer, they can be assured that the Lord will reveal areas of their lives where they need more surrender and greater efforts toward living a Christ-centered life.

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and maintaining a state of revival requires continuous input from the Lord. Haggai's second, third, and fourth messages were designed to reassure the people and to keep them moving along the path of obedience.

The promise of God's presence Haggai's second message (2:1-9) was delivered approximately one month after the reconstruction resumed. Ezra records the remnant's mixed emotions upon the laying of the new temple's foundation (Ezra 3:10-13). Most of the people were overjoyed at the progress, but those who were old enough to remember Solomon's temple, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, wept over the comparatively small size of the new temple. In Haggai's day the same mixture of emotions apparently prevailed again, for God called attention to the fact that this temple would be as nothing in comparison to the glory of the former temple (Hag. 2:3).

These words from God seem almost cruelly blunt. His people were doing the best they could, but He called it "nothing." Though His words were blunt, they were true. It was necessary to state the painful truth in order to lay a foundation for another truth, which was glorious. One day the Lord would fill that simple and unimpressive temple with a greater glory than Solomon's golden edifice ever displayed (v. 7). It was necessary to establish the fact that the people's own labor amounted to nothing so that they would realize that the true glory of their temple would be the Lord's presence rather than their own craftsmanship. "I am with you," the Lord said encouragingly (v. 4), and "my spirit remaineth among you" (v. 5).

❖ Until we recognize our worthlessness, we are not prepared for God to use us gloriously. As long as we consider ourselves capable, we will not trust the Lord as we should. Our self-assessment must be realistic, not flattering. The Lord will help us see ourselves as we really are in order to help us trust Him to use us far beyond our abilities.

The fact of God's forgiveness Haggai's third message (2:10-19), delivered about two months after the second, is the most difficult to understand. Its main point is easily discerned, but determining how it contributes to the message of the book is more difficult.

The best place to begin is with the easy part—the main point. Haggai was to ask the priests two questions. The first was whether a garment containing a piece of consecrated meat could, by touching another object, consecrate that object. (The reference is to ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness, that is, whether or not something was ceremonially fit to use in sacrificial ritual.) The answer, according to the Mosaic law, is no. Cleanness does not pass from one object to another by touch. But the case is just the opposite with

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uncleanness. Something unclean touching another object renders that object unclean. Defilement is casually transmitted, but cleanness is not. Only by certain inherent qualities and ceremonial washings was an item considered clean before the Lord.

The lesson for the people is that the sacrifices they offered during those eighteen years of disobedience did nothing to cleanse the people's impurity. Just the opposite was true: their impurity defiled the sacrifices (v. 14). Because the people remained in an impure condition during those years, God chastened them with the problems listed in chapter 1 and repeated here (vv. 16-19).

- ❖ People today must recognize the fact that going to church or doing good deeds does not remove their guilt. Rather, their guilt defiles those acts. Until they have a change of heart toward sin, they have no basis for forgiveness.

Why does God remind the people of their disobedience four months after they mended their ways? The key to understanding the purpose of this message lies in its final statement: "From this day I will bless you" (v. 19). God is reassuring His people that their sins are behind them. Sacrifices did not remove those sins, for the sacrifices themselves were tainted by the touch of impure hands. The only explanation for God's change of disposition toward His people was the fact that they had repented. As serious as their sins had been, and as deeply as the people had suffered for them, God was now putting them in the past. So long as the people's hearts stayed true toward Him, they could expect nothing but His blessing in the future, for He had forgiven their sins.

The vision of God's victory Haggai's fourth message is the shortest (2:20-23). Delivered on the same day as the third, it promised a coming day of divine visitation when God would conquer the nations and exalt His people. This message reiterates part of the second message (2:6-9), emphasizing the shaking that God will do one day when He replaces the present order with a new one of His own making.

- ❖ Disobedience always brings doubt. A Christian living in sin naturally begins to question whether he or she can really count upon the promises embraced at salvation. God's dealings with Israel suggest how to deal with these doubts. Reassurance is futile until repentance takes place. Only when a Christian is living in good conscience before the Lord can he have assurance that his life is moving in the very center of God's river of redemption and that eternity holds nothing but glory for him.

Assurance and Remembrance of Sin

The lesson raises the pertinent question, "Why did God remind the people of their disobedience four months after they mended their ways?" This is an interesting question, especially in light of the Lord's promises in Psalm 103:12 ("As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us") and Jeremiah 31:34 ("I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more").

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These promises renew God's pledge to Israel that reaches all the way back to Abraham, through whom God promised to bless the whole world, and to David, to whom God promised an eternal kingdom. The Babylonian captivity would have cast doubt upon these promises in many Jewish minds, but now that God's people are once again living in obedience to Him, He reassures them that His plans have not changed and that all the good things He has promised will come to pass.

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Does God remember our sin? The answer is yes and no. Yes, God remembers our sin because His mind is infinite. He knows everything and can forget nothing. We may also say, however, that God does not remember our sin. This second answer depends upon a biblical understanding of the word "remember." We often think that "remember" means that we recall to our minds something that we had forgotten. Sometimes this type of remembering appears to be almost by accident. The biblical concept of remembering is somewhat different. The Bible uses this word to mean "to purposefully call to mind." While in one sense God can never forget anything, He has promised that if our sins are forgiven He will never call them to mind against us. He purposefully calls to mind the virtue and the power of Christ's blood and righteousness.

As believers we often remember our sins. Perhaps some member of your group has a sin in his past that he just can't seem to forget. Perhaps there is someone in your group who struggles with doubts about her salvation because she can't forget her past sins.

If we have come to Christ for salvation, we need to do two things. First, call to mind the promise of John 6:37, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Second, we need to think like God. We need to purposefully call to mind the virtue and the power of Christ's blood and righteousness and purposefully put out of our minds any thoughts about their sins.

Special Problems and Topics

❖ **Unfulfilled Prophecies in Haggai:** Speaking through Haggai, God made promises that seem to have failed. The temple built in Haggai's day never housed any such glory as God promised in 2:7-9, and God did not perform the shaking of the world and exaltation of Zerubbabel that He promised in 2:21-23. How are we to understand these promises? Surely God's Word has not failed, has it?

Some interpreters find the fulfillment of the promise of glory in this temple during the time of Christ's first advent. The temple which stood in His day was essentially the same temple, though largely reconstructed under Herod the Great shortly before Jesus' birth. However, Christ's first coming was not a time of glory but of humiliation. If His presence in the temple filled it with glory, that glory was so veiled that very few were even aware of it.

It seems far more likely that the glory God refers to is that which will characterize the millennium, when Christ returns to rule the world. But Zerubbabel's temple has long since been destroyed; an Islamic shrine now stands on the temple site. How could it be said that "this house" would be filled with millennial glory? The answer to this question seems to lie in how God views the temple. Apparently He does not see the different structures that have stood at different times as being different temples. He said to the Jews of Haggai's day, "Who is left among you that saw *this* house

in *her* former glory?" (2:3). The temple those people were building was in God's eyes the same temple that had stood there previously. The millennial temple will simply be an extension of the one temple that has occupied that sacred site. God was simply promising the people that their efforts were making a contribution to the ultimate glory that would characterize His temple.

Turning now to the promise made to Zerubbabel, we must understand that Zerubbabel in his lifetime never occupied a position of exaltation over the nations, as God seemed to have promised. A universal shaking did not take place; it has not taken place to this day. Other Scriptures lead us to believe that this is another promise to be fulfilled during the Millennium. But how can it be said that Zerubbabel will enjoy the place of God's favor in that day? Is he to be king? Of course we know that Jesus will be King during the Millennium. But sometimes God refers to the millennial King under the name of an Old Testament predecessor. Three passages call Him David (Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25). David prefigures Christ in his conquering of enemy nations; Zerubbabel prefigures Christ in his reestablishment of God's people in their land and in the restoration of proper forms of worship. Zerubbabel will be God's chosen signet (Hag. 2:23), not in his own person, but in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Additional Activities

❖ **Scripture Search:** The word *consider* appears five times in Haggai’s two chapters (1:5, 7; 2:15; twice in 2:18). In the body of the lesson we observed that the underlying Hebrew expression literally means “to set one’s heart” upon something. The Old Testament contains many instances of similar expressions of setting one’s heart, preparing one’s heart, or laying something to heart. The things upon which the heart focuses include persons, events, deeds, outcomes, and divine revelation. In the table provided, categorize the following references according to the object upon which the heart is set. In some cases you might need to read the surrounding context in order to decide. As an example, consider Job 7:17: “What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him? and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him?” This verse speaks of God’s having set His heart upon man, so you would cate-

gorize it under “Persons.” The other verses for this activity are Exodus 7:23; Deuteronomy 32:46; Job 34:14; Ecclesiastes 7:2; Isaiah 47:7; 57:1; Ezekiel 40:4; Daniel 6:14; Hosea 4:8; and Haggai 1:5, 7. You will find a set of answers after the review questions.

After thinking about these verses, try to formulate a description of what this important biblical concept means. What aspects of life does setting one’s heart affect? Of course, the heart includes such inward processes as thinking, desiring, feeling, and determination. But the contexts of most of these passages indicate that setting the heart affects another important area of life as well. What is it? After you have made your best effort to explain the meaning and results of setting one’s heart, you can refer to the section after the review questions for a brief discussion of some of the conclusions you should have reached.

Persons	
Events	
Outcomes	
Deeds	
Divine Revelation	

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Discussion of Scripture Search Activity

Your categorization of verses should be as follows:

Persons	Job 7:17; 34:14; Dan. 6:14
Events	Exod. 7:23; Isa. 57:1
Outcomes	Ecc. 7:2; Isa. 47:7
Deeds	Hos. 4:8; Hag. 1:5, 7
Divine Revelation	Deut. 32:46; Ezek. 40:4

The teaching of these verses suggests that setting one's heart, or laying something to heart, signifies giving careful attention to that thing. This act involves much more than casual notice. It springs from the assumption that something is important and demands

something of the one doing the thinking. The aspect of life it affects in addition to thinking is behavior. Whatever someone truly lays to heart becomes apparent by how he or she behaves.

Everyday life is full of events and outcomes that convey spiritual truth. God's revelation in completed Scripture demands our attention. Our deeds would tell us much about ourselves if we would stop to think about them. Yet how many people today are truly setting their hearts upon these things? Do not the masses of humanity march on toward eternity giving no more than casual notice to these critical issues? Is it not true that even most Christians race through life oblivious to the fact that God is trying to get their attention with regard to issues other than eventually making it to heaven? What is *your* heart set upon, and how does your behavior demonstrate that fact?