

MAJOR ON THE MINORS | HOPE CHAPEL

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

Nobody Decides to Drift - God Moves First - He Fills What You Bring
Pastor Andrew Cole | Sunday 13 September 2026 | 9AM Gawler

Big Idea: *Drift does not need a decision. The people of Haggai were not rebels - they were busy, decent, hard-working people whose priorities quietly reordered themselves while they weren't watching. God's response was not shame. It was a call home - and the moment they moved, he said: I am with you.*

Background - A Pile of Stones in Jerusalem

Haggai is only two chapters long. It was written in 520 BC to the exiles who had returned home from Babylon - people who had prayed for 70 years to come home, and who had finally seen that prayer answered. The prophet Haggai was approximately 70 years old when he delivered these four messages - old enough to have seen Solomon's temple with his own eyes before the Babylonians burned it down.

Every message in the book is dated to the day. This is one of the most precisely dated books in the entire Old Testament. God was very specific about the timing.

The context: in 538 BC, the exiles came home from Babylon with fire in their hearts. 70 years of answered prayer. In 536 BC, they laid the temple foundation. It was an extraordinary moment. Some shouted for joy. The old men wept - they could already see this temple would be smaller than the one they remembered.

Then opposition came. Criticism sowed doubt. Energy drained. And then - without a meeting, without a vote, without anyone standing up and saying 'we are giving up' - the work simply stopped. And the foundation stones sat in the open air in Jerusalem, untouched, for 16 years.

The people who walked past those stones every day were not rebels. They were busy, decent, hard-working people who still believed every word of it. And that is what should get our attention.

POINT 1 | Nobody Decides to Drift

Andrew opened with a question: what is the thing you keep meaning to do? Not the thing you decided against. The thing you never decided anything about. How long has it been on the list?

That is Haggai's question too. Because the people in this book did not decide to abandon the temple. There was no meeting. There was no decision. There was only a phrase that they kept using - and it cost them 16 years without them ever noticing.

Haggai 1:2 *These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord.*

Haggai 1:4 *Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?*

Not 'we refuse.' Not 'we don't care.' Just - not yet. The most reasonable sentence in the world. You can say it for 16 years without ever noticing what it costs you.

God's complaint was never that they had good homes. The panelled house was a finished home - the details added once the bones are done. God is not against them having good things. His concern was the order. Their houses got finished. His did not. The question was never whether they had good things - it was what was queuing behind what.

Haggai 1:6 *You have planted much but harvested little. You eat but never have enough. You drink but never have your fill. You put on clothes but are not warm. You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it.*

Everyone working. Everyone tired. Nothing adding up. The diagnosis was not laziness - they were working hard. But in the wrong order. And so God gives them the great command of the book:

Haggai 1:7 *Give careful thought to your ways.*

In Hebrew, this literally means to set your heart on your roads. Not where you meant to go. Where this road actually comes out. Because we drift - and then we call the drift a plan.

Reflect: *What is the thing on your list that has been 'not yet' for a year? Two years? More? Not the thing you decided against - the thing you never decided anything about. Name it to yourself honestly. That is where Haggai begins.*

POINT 2 | God Moves First

Haggai preached on the first day of the month. By the 24th day, the people were back on the tools. 16 years of 'not yet' - turned around in 23 days. And God had every right to be finished with these people after 16 wasted years. But watch what he did instead.

Haggai 1:13 *I am with you, declares the Lord.*

Not: finish the work and then I'll show up. Not: prove yourselves first and then I'll be there. They turned - and God said 'I am with you' immediately. The presence came first. The strength came out of the presence. God did not open with a lecture. He opened with 'I am with you.'

And then the next verse says something even better:

Haggai 1:14 *So the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the Lord Almighty.*

Even their obedience gets credited to God. Even the wanting to was grace. If something has shifted in you recently - a desire to pray again, to return to something, to put something right - that was not you being clever. That was him stirring your heart.

God did not wait until they finished to say 'I am with you.' He said it at the moment they moved.

And then, once they had moved, God made a promise that is one of the most freeing sentences in the book:

Haggai 2:19 *From this day on I will bless you.*

Not when the temple is finished. Not when the work is done. From the day they turned. You do not have to catch up before God starts blessing. He starts at the turn.

Reflect: *Is something stirring in you right now - a prompting to return to something, to take a step you've been putting off? Andrew's point was clear: don't think that is you. That is him. He started this conversation. Not you.*

POINT 3 | He Fills What You Bring

A month into the rebuilding, they hit a wall. Not opposition this time - discouragement. The old men could see how small this temple was compared to Solomon's. And comparison quietly does what opposition cannot:

Opposition at least tells you the work matters. Comparison quietly tells you it's not worth doing.

Haggai 2:3–4 *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, Zerubbabel. Be strong, Joshua. And be strong, all you people of the land and work. For I am with you, declares the Lord Almighty.*

God does not say stop comparing. He does not say size doesn't matter. He says be strong - three times - and then makes an outrageous promise about a smaller building:

Haggai 2:9 *The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, says the Lord Almighty.*

That only makes sense one way. Glory is not about what a house costs - it is about who fills it. Which is good news for anyone who has ever looked at what they have to offer God and thought it was too small.

The Signet Ring

The last word of the whole book is personal. Spoken to one discouraged governor of a small, poor, unimpressive province with a stalled building project:

Haggai 2:23 *I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, declares the Lord, and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you.*

A signet ring was how a king sealed decisions - pressed into wax to make an authority real. God is saying to this one ordinary, discouraged man: your work carries my seal. It may look like nothing from the outside. Heaven has its name on it.

Your ordinary faithfulness carries the authority of heaven.

The One Day

Did the promise come true? The temple was finished in 516 BC - smaller, no ark, for 500 years. It must have looked like a failure to some. And then, one day, a carpenter from Nazareth walked in through the gate. The same temple that had sat as a pile of stones for 16 years. The glory did not come back as gold. It came back with a face.

And the temple is not made of stone now. You are God's temple. His Spirit dwells in you and in me. When God asks 'consider your ways,' he is asking: what are we building with our lives? And the answer is people.

Reflect: *Is there something you have been looking at and thinking it is too small, too ordinary, too unimpressive to matter? God's answer to the unimpressive temple was the same as his answer to you: the glory is not about what it costs. It is about who fills it.*

Three Responses - Which One Is You?

Andrew closed with three invitations - not plans, but actions. One step, taken today.

→ **THE DRIFTER** Name your 'not yet.' The one thing. The thing that has been next year for a few years now. Don't make a plan - plans are how we drift politely. Take one step. Because the sentence 'the time has not yet come' has never once in the history of the world been followed by the right time showing up on its own.

→ **THE DISCOURAGED** Haggai 2:4 - Be strong. I am with you. The size of what you have to offer does not determine the glory of what God fills. Stop comparing what you carry to what someone else carries. God has sealed your ordinary faithfulness with his signet ring.

→ **THE UNNOTICED** Someone in this room is doing something ordinary that nobody claps for. It is not seen by the people around you. But heaven has its name on your work. Your faithfulness carries the authority of heaven. You are not unseen.

Conclusion

Don't leave with a plan instead of an action.

When you move, hear what God says over you:

'I am with you - from this day on I will bless you.'

16 years of nothing took 23 days to turn around. It does not have to be next year. Don't confuse drift with waiting on God - they are not the same thing. Take one step. The blessing starts at the turn, not the finish.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

Use these on your own during the week, or with your LifeGroup.

1. Andrew asked: what is the thing you keep meaning to do - not the thing you decided against, but the thing you never decided anything about? How long has it been on your list? Name it honestly.
2. The people of Haggai said 'not yet' for 16 years - never noticing what it was costing them. Haggai 1:6 describes the result: working hard, but nothing adding up. Does that resonate with any area of your life right now?

3. God said 'I am with you' the moment they turned - before the work was finished, before they had proven themselves. Does your experience of God feel more like 'prove yourself first' or 'I am with you, now move'? What has shaped that?

4. Andrew said even the wanting to return was God stirring their hearts - not their own cleverness. Has something been stirring in you recently? A prompting you've been half-noticing? What would it look like to treat that as God starting the conversation?

5. The old men were discouraged by comparison - this temple was smaller than the one they remembered. Andrew said comparison quietly tells you the work isn't worth doing, while opposition at least tells you it matters. Where has comparison been quietly draining your energy?

6. The signet ring was spoken to an ordinary, discouraged governor doing unnoticed work. Do you identify with the unnoticed? What would it change about how you approach your daily faithfulness if you genuinely believed heaven had its name on it?

Key Scriptures This Week

- Haggai 1:2 - The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the Lord
- Haggai 1:4 - Panelled houses while this house remains a ruin
- Haggai 1:6 - You have planted much but harvested little
- Haggai 1:7 - Give careful thought to your ways
- Haggai 1:13 - I am with you, declares the Lord
- Haggai 1:14 - The Lord stirred up the spirit of the people
- Haggai 2:4 - Be strong, all you people of the land, and work
- Haggai 2:9 - The glory of this present house will be greater than the former
- Haggai 2:19 - From this day on I will bless you
- Haggai 2:23 - I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you