#33 REGAINING LOST MOMENTUM  
Haggai 1:1-15; Ezra 5:1, 2; 14, 15

Introduction

There are times in life when it seems that no progress is being made. We are at a standstill in some area of our lives; professionally, financially, relationally, or spiritually. These times drain our motivation and challenge our determination. We have lost our momentum.

In football there is a term, which is used to describe an offensive play where a runner is restricted from advancing the ball against the defense. It is called “stopped forward progress.” The defensive team stops the runner and, despite the exertion of great energy, he cannot make further gains. At this point the whistle is blown and the play is dead.

In the book of Ezra we find the people of God stopped in their forward progress of building the Temple. They lost their spiritual momentum.

We have discussed some of the things, which often cause our spiritual progress to be delayed or stopped. **These causes include:**

- Wrong associations.
- External attacks.
- Disobedient living.
- Discouragement.
- Apathy.
- Preoccupation with things of lesser importance.
In our study of Ezra we have seen that the Jews who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple found themselves at a point of “stopped forward progress.”

Note the progression of events:

- Vision of building imparted.
- Commitment made.
- Altar rebuilt.
- Foundations of the Temple laid.
- Opposition encountered.
- Building progress stopped.

The building project came to a screeching halt for various reasons. The initial reason for the delay was the opposition of enemies. However this does not explain 14 to 20 years of such a delay.

Once they lost their momentum, regaining it was very difficult.

The same is true for us. When spiritual momentum is lost, it is important for us to regain it as soon as possible.

Part of developing as a spiritual leader involves regaining lost spiritual momentum and learning how to maintain it over the long haul of one’s life and service to God.

How do we protect our spiritual momentum and regain it when it is lost?

1. Recognize the real problem.

Take a look at God’s description of the real problem behind the delay in rebuilding the Temple:

Haggai 1:1-12 (NIV) In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest: 2 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built.’” 3 Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet
Haggai: 4 “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” 5 Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 6 You have planted much, but have 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.” 7 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 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. 9 “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. 10 Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. 11 I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands.” 12 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, 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.

At least 14 years had elapsed since the people had stopped building. The Temple remained unbuilt, cluttered with debris, overgrown with weeds.

Imagine or recall the image of a building project which has been aborted for 14, 16, perhaps 20 years!

Into such a situation God sends a prophet named Haggai. All of his recorded prophecies occurred over a period of 4 months, (from August 29, 520 B.C to December 18. 520 B.C.).

In Haggai’s first message he addressed the issue of the delayed progress of the Temple. He was very direct and forceful in addressing the real problem behind this long delay.

**Haggai 1:2, 3 (NVI)** This is what the LORD Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built.’” Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai.

The people were making lots of excuses for the delay.

The real problem was that the people were preoccupied with things of lesser importance. They had put God and His work on the back burner.

Quite often we lose spiritual momentum for the very same reasons, and we offer similar excuses.
When our spiritual progress has stopped, or slowed considerably, we usually are able to articulate some “justifiable reason” for the situation. Behind the excuses is often a preoccupation with our own lives, pursuits and values.

This was the problem in this situation. God’s people were ignoring the building of the temple.

Look at their excuse:

Haggai 1:2 (NIV) This is what the LORD Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come for the LORD’s house to be built.’”

The excuse was weak and missed the mark of reality. They were looking for a way to justify their delays and inattention to God’s house. They had not recognized their real problem.

Spiritual momentum is never regained until we recognize the real problem.

2. Understand the consequences of lost spiritual momentum.

Too often we think that spiritual momentum doesn’t matter. It does!

Take a look at the catastrophic consequences the people of God were experiencing as a result of neglecting the house of the Lord:

Haggai 1:5-11 (NIV) Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 6 You have planted much, but have 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.” 7 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 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. 9 “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. 10 Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. 11 I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands.”

Loss spiritual momentum is not inconsequential. It leaves us in a place of depletion and discipline.
The Lord will not let His children by-pass His loving discipline. They had forgotten their call and commitment to build the house of the Lord first!

Wrong priorities and pursuits attract God’s response — His disciplinary response.

It is not that God punishes us with bad things; it is that our preoccupation with things of lesser importance generally results in some form of “drought” in our lives.

Loss of spiritual momentum has some very critical consequences.

Spiritual momentum is never regained until we understand the consequences that come when we lose it.

3. **Receive God’s correction.**

The regaining of spiritual momentum requires a willingness on our part to receive God’s correction.

God brought a corrective word to His people — *a word that addressed their real spiritual problem:*

> **Haggai 1:5-11 (NIV)** Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 6 You have planted much, but have 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.” 7 This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. 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. 9 “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. 10 Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. 11 I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands.”

What was Haggai’s message? What direction did he give God’s people?

*His message can be summarized with two statements:*

- Think deeply about what you are doing.
- Begin to build again.
This is God’s message to us.

When we have lost spiritual momentum, we too must “give careful thought to our ways.”

The word “ways” in Hebrew means “walk, journey, path, road, course, etc.”

If our spiritual momentum has stopped or slowed, we must start thinking the right way and start going in the the right direction! Don’t continue as you are!

*Jesus made this clear in one of seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor:*

**Revelation 2:2-5 (NIV)** I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for My name, and have not grown weary. 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

*God’s correction is painful, but it can be very productive, if we listen to it and respond to it:*

**Hebrews 12:5-13 (NIV)** And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.” 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. 12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

To regain spiritual momentum we must receive God’s correction.
4. Expect God to bless your forward movement.

God is an incredibly good God. He blesses our most feeble efforts and obedience.

As soon as God’s people repented from their lost momentum and started fresh forward motion, Go and helped them:

**Haggai 1:12-15 (NIV)** Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jehozadak, 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. 13 Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: “I am with you,” declares the LORD. 14 So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, 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, their God, 15 on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.

**Ezra 5:1, 2 (NIV)** Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. 2 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set to work to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

**Ezra 6:14, 15 (NIV)** So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. 15 The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

When the people of God were confronted with these words of Haggai they had to make a decision. What would they do? How would they respond?

They responded with obedience. They made a commitment to begin again! They decided to regain their lost momentum.

Regaining lost momentum is not an easy process. Much more energy and effort is required to start momentum than to sustain it.

*How do we regain spiritual momentum?*
1. Recognize the real problem.

2. Understand the consequences of lost spiritual momentum.

3. Receive God’s correction.

4. Expect God to bless your forward movement.

When we do these things we can expect God to bless our renewed forward motion and help us recapture, sustain and even accelerate our spiritual momentum.