

***rebuilding***

Christi Brown reflects on building houses in Kenya with Habitat for Humanity. Here's part of her reflection:

One of my greatest achievements ever was building houses in Kenya with Habitat for Humanity. I was 23, had received my master's in engineering three weeks prior, and climbed on a plane alone to fly overseas to join an international team of strangers in Nairobi. From there we drove three and a half hours in a very crowded van to a small village without electricity or running water. This village was called Kimuri, and it was to be our home for the next 10 days.

The first full day we were there, we split into teams and started building three houses. The first day was by far the hardest for me. I didn't know how to swing a hammer very well, and there was a lot of nailing to be done. Being a perfectionist, I was in tears over bent nails, many do-overs and bruised fingers. It was hard, tiring and frustrating work.

But as the week went on -- and as our team, the homeowners and locals helping out became a community -- things became much easier. By the last day, we were all swinging hammers like Bob Vila from "This Old House." We still shed tears, but for much happier reasons. We had built three houses together, and three Kenyan families would be able to live in healthier homes.

In our focus passage for tonight, God, via prophet Haggai calls the Israelite people to build. 18 years earlier they've returned from exile in Babylonia. They were refugees there. Now they've been able to return home, with the main game being the rebuilding of the temple.

The temple occupied a central place in the lives of the Jewish people. It symbolized the dwelling place of God. It was *the* place of worship. It was where the community of faith gathered.

They had started well -- in the first year back the foundations had been laid ... but that was it. Not another stone was laid for 17 long years. Why?

They were too busy rebuilding their own lives ... their own homes ... their own family life ... their own livelihoods. No time, sorry, to worry about rebuilding the Lord's house!

God is not content to let the years wile away, so the Lord, through Haggai calls them to re-establish their priorities.

## **HAGGAI 1:15 – 2:9**

It's as if the prophet Haggai says something like this:

"You live in nice, comfortable homes. You spend your time on things that reward you -- eating and drinking, buying nice clothes and blowing your money on frivolous things -- all to the neglect of the house of the Lord. The moment has come for you to refocus your time, resources and energy on building for God instead of yourselves. The Lord calls you to build."

So what do they do? If they were like most other groups scolded by an Old Testament prophet, they would have resisted. But no – the people listen; they act on the word of the Lord. Yes; they start building. Everyone pitches in.

But they're not too far down the track when discouragement starts creeping in. The oldies have memories of the previous grand temple, which leaves *this* attempt right in the shade. Why bother?! Why waste our time?

Yet three times the Lord says, "Take courage". God orders them, "Work!" This is an unusual command from the Lord. More often, it's something like "Do not fear ... or don't be afraid".

As Christi Brown reflects,

God says, "Work!" Go, do. Get up off your floor cushions, get off your donkeys, turn away from yourself, toward me, and work! I know it's hard to build, particularly when it doesn't look anything like you've envisioned in your mind. I know it takes blood, sweat, tears, and sacrifices. Do it anyway.

But look at what 1:13 says ... *Haggai told them that the Lord had promised to be with them.* “I am with you,” says the Lord. I was with your ancestors as they escaped from Egypt. I am with you now.

You are called to build, and through it all, I will be with you.”

This same God, this God of wind and fire, this God of the still small voice, this God of the brightest sunset and the coolest breeze, this God who offers new life through Jesus Christ continues to journey with his people.

This same God calls us, too, to build. God calls us to take a good look at ourselves ... to take a good hard look at our priorities and where our life in God ... in Christ fits into that. This same God calls us to re-prioritize our lives - to live out our faith ... whatever that might mean for us ... to be followers ... disciples of the way of Christ.

God in Christ and the resources of the Spirit calls us to build – build up our relationships, our community, our families, our church, our spiritual lives, one another.

God, through Haggai is saying to God’s people of 2500 years ago – enough! Get your house in order. Start rebuilding. Start rebuilding lives that have your relationship with God ... your worship of God at the centre. Re-prioritize your life for the Lord. Through Haggai Gpd says the very same thing to us now.

For me, that's where *lacuna* comes in. Lacuna ... the space between the words, the distractions, the clutter, the busyness of God. Yes, God *is* with us in the topsy-turvy of life. Yet, sometimes it's only when we make time for the 'spaces' in life, that we find ourselves intentionally in communion with Gpd. That's certainly my experience. It's then - in the broad sense of the word, we find ourselves truly in worship of God.

Building and rebuilding is a key theme throughout Haggai. It points us to the building and rebuilding that's vital in our life in God. We need to build lacuna into our lives. Where there's space for God, where Jesus is the centre.

We need to ensure that building and rebuilding are there in our walk with God, that walk we call discipleship. What might that building look like?

Perhaps it's a relationship that has been strained and tense for some time. Is God calling you to build hope and listening and healing into that relationship?

Perhaps it's a ministry of this church that God is calling you to invest your time, your gifts, and your passion into. Is God calling you to help build that?

Perhaps it's something as seemingly basic as your own spiritual life ... your own daily walk with God ... where your 'action' for God is balanced with reflection, through prayer, through scripture reading, through contemplation.

There is a bridge in China nicknamed Suicide Bridge. Upwards of 1,000 people have died by jumping off the bridge. One man called Chen Si decided to do something about it. Every weekend, Chen Si gets up early and travels by bus to the bridge.

He keeps watch for those who seem suicidal or depressed. He carries a billboard, which features a red heart at its centre. His message is simple: "You only have one life, please give yourself a chance. The sun is bound to shine brighter tomorrow." There has been a dramatic reduction in the number of suicides at the bridge because of this one man's actions. An ordinary man answered his call and made an extraordinary contribution.

Habitat for Humanity was founded by a guy called Millard Fuller. In his book "The Theology of the Hammer," Fuller states: "Our Christian faith ... mandates that we do more than just talk about faith and sing about love. We must put faith and love into action to make them real, to make them come alive for people. Faith must be incarnated; ... it must become more than a verbal proclamation or an intellectual assent."

In Haggai's day, the people's rebuilding of the temple embodied a deep reality – it was a demonstration of them giving God #1 priority in their lives; building their life on God and God's life, making room for lacuna ... space for God ... and the worship of the living God in their lives.

**Friends, how, where, when will you build a sense of lacuna into your life?**