

# life groups

NLC Weekly Sermon Study

Week of March 19, 2017  
Sermon: Nothing New—Squirrel  
(Haggai)



# Schedule

**30 MIN** Eat, Meet & Greet

**15 MIN** Ice Breaker Game: **Categories**. Divide your group into four teams or more, with about five members each. Encourage them to team with people they know the least. Instruct each team to find at least six things in common with every team member. Don't allow teams to use simple things like height, hair color, or clothing worn. Limiting the similarities to non-material things helps people learn more about each other and engage in active, more meaningful conversations that will promote inclusion and lasting connections. The game ends once every team has come up with six things they have in common; the winner is the team that achieves the objective first.

**NOTE:** Feel free to use as much or as little of the study as you like, in whatever way flows most naturally for your group.

## OPENING PRAYER

**45–60 MIN** Nothing New—Squirrel (Haggai)

- Ps Rick opened this series with this thought:  
**ECCL. 1:9 (NLT)** “History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new.”
- In the book of Genesis we see that God created the heavens and the earth, and it was good. Shortly thereafter, Adam and Eve ruined everything.
  - › That's a good summary of the Old Testament. God blesses and provides for his people, and then his people continually **forget** what He's done for them and slowly **drift away**.
  - › Eventually the nation of Israel drifts so far from God that He does something drastic to get their **attention**—He lets Israel's enemies destroy their cities and carry the people off to exile.
  - › Later, some of them return to Israel to **rebuild** God's house and their lives, **based on God's plan and purpose, not their own**.

**It's human nature to wander and drift from God. It's God's nature to pursue and be faithful to his people.**

**Q1.** Are you naturally easily distracted? How about in your relationship with God?

- For some of us, that is how our **spiritual life** looks—God blesses us and shows us how to stay on his path aligned with his purpose but we get easily **distracted** by LIFE, and we lose our focus.
- Fortunately for us, God is faithful and remains the same today!

**2 TIM2:13 (NLT)** "... if we are faithless, he remains faithful..."

- **History overview:** In 587 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar and his army crushed the People of God, destroying Jerusalem, and driving the people into exile. To make matters worse, they destroyed the house where God dwelt (Solomon's Temple), stripping away the spiritual identity of the Jewish people. They were completely devastated.
- The Jews were taken into captivity for 50 years—technically 70—because they were already in captivity for a while before the destruction of the Temple. But for 50 years they were away from their home and away from their place of worship.
- In 538 BC, King Cyrus made a decree and allowed about 50,000 Israelites to go back to Judah to rebuild. Finally, after five decades, they get to go back home, with the **purpose of rebuilding** God's house—the temple.
- The Jews started rebuilding the temple—laying the foundation and putting the altar in place. But when they were met with **opposition**, they gave up and quit.

**READ HAGGAI 1:2**

- › We all tend to do this: when opposition or resistance comes, we think, "It must not be the right time, because this is too hard."
- › For 14 years, the Israelites go back to the same pattern, **taking their focus off of God and focusing on themselves**. Enter Haggai.

**TAKE TURNS READING HAGGAI 1: 3-5**

- A "paneled house" represented high end living, the best of the best.
  - › God is not against us having nice things but putting nice things ahead of him.
  - › What's wrong is when we only **focus** on our house rather than God's house. Our priorities are misplaced.
  - › **God was NOT at the center of their lives.**
- Why was the TEMPLE so important in that day?
  - › It represented God being at the CENTER of their everyday life.
  - › The people got used to life without the Temple, without church. The temple laid in ruins—an example of **misplaced priorities**.
  - › With plenty of OTHER things to do, it can be easy to put God on the back burner, to drift from God's agenda and focus on our own.

**HAVE SOMEONE READ HAGGAI 1:6**

- › Modern translation: "You are working your butt off, but still feel like you are not getting anywhere in life."

**Q2.** Do you ever find yourself thinking this way: "I am busy making a living, but not making a life"?

- This is the human condition without Jesus: FRUITLESS LABOR.  
**READ HAGGAI 1:7**
- ***Why give careful thought to your ways?*** This is human nature; if we give no thought to how we are living, we will naturally live for ourselves. **SELF** is our default mode.

**PSALM 139: 23-24 (NLT)** “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”

### HOW CAN WE GET OUR FOCUS BACK ON GOD IN OUR CRAZY BUSY WORLD?

1. Allow God to STIR something up in you again.

**READ HAGGAI 1:13-14**

- “*stirred up the spirit*” (v.14) means to **AWAKEN**.
- The first step towards getting somewhere is to **decide you’re not going to stay where you are**.
- God always begins in your heart, as you **give careful thought to your ways**, open your heart to Him, and get your focus back on Him.
- There will be times when God reminds you of His purpose and plan for your life, of His goodness, and of what it was like to walk with him in freedom and joy—not to discourage you but to let you know **it is still there for you**.

**Q3.** What is God stirring in your heart today?

2. Be STRONG and get to WORK.

**READ HAGGAI 2:4**

- Three times God said, **be strong and do the work**. This was very similar to the command he gave Joshua: be strong and courageous.
  - › Why did he tell them this? Because they got **discouraged**. Anytime we get discouraged, we lose our strength and focus.

### THE ISRAELITES FACED TWO TYPES OF DISCOURAGEMENT:

- **Comparison**
  - › They were doing the same thing we tend to do—comparing their start with someone else’s finish.
  - › **We can all get incredibly discouraged when we compare where we are to where other people are.**

**Q4.** Have you ever compared how you're doing to how your neighbors or friends are doing (spiritually, emotionally, socially, social media, financially)? How can you protect yourself from comparisons?

- **Lack of Progress**

- › You start a diet and eat only green things and drink almond milk, but after one week, you gained 3 lbs.
- › You try hard to overcome one sin thinking, "I've been walking with Jesus all this time, but I just can't ever overcome that one sin. Maybe it's just not worth it."

- **Faith must always pass the test of discouragement.**

**Q5.** When you want to give up, what do you do?

- Be strong. Do the work. Keep praying, even when you don't see results. Continue to open up God's Word, and seek Him daily in His word. Continue to do the right thing, even when you're not getting anywhere.

**GAL 6:9** "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

**"THE REASON PEOPLE GIVE UP SO QUICKLY IS THAT THEY TEND TO LOOK AT HOW FAR THEY HAVE TO GO, INSTEAD OF HOW FAR THEY HAVE GOTTEN."**

- God says, "Be strong and do the work." Why? "For I am with you," declares the Lord.
  - › This is key! It's not that you do it on your own, it's that you do it **with Him**.

**HAVE SOMEONE READ HAGGAI 2:9**

- › How could he say that? Because God was going to do something they could not imagine.
- › God was not just referring to the temple they were building, but to what was going to come.

**HAVE PEOPLE TAKE TURNS READING JOHN 17:22-24**

- You who are followers of Jesus are the **temple** of the Holy Spirit. So be strong and get to work, because GOD's Spirit now dwells in you!
  - › You don't have to be strong and do the work **on your own**. We don't have to be strong in our own power. **Why: God's power is WITH you, but it is also IN you**, and greater is He who is in you, than he who is the world.

**Q6.** How would you live differently if you truly embraced God's promise, "I am with you"? How does it change the challenges you face when you understand that God lives in you?

- **God doesn't ask us to ACCOMPLISH the work. He asks us to START the work, then He promises to FINISH it.**
3. Serve for GOD's VISION by placing the needs of OTHERS before your own.
- When we let God's priorities be our priorities, it's not about doing more FOR God, but about working WITH God and allowing Him to use your STORY to share the good news of Jesus with others.
- READ ISAIAH 58:12 NLT** "Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a rebuilders of walls and a restorer of homes."
- **God can and will use you to rebuild others if you simply submit to God.**
  - MSG version: "You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past. You'll be known as those who can fix anything, restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate, make the community livable again."
  - **God's blessings come when He is truly at the CENTER of our lives.**
- LUKE 12:31** "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need."
- **The way to find the life you want is NOT to try harder. It's to simply TRUST God and REST in His provision.**
- Q7.** What does it look like on a practical level to work in God's strength, rather than your own, to trust God and rest in His provision?

**TAKE PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAY OVER NEEDS**

- Reserve some time at the end to pray over any needs that have been expressed during the discussion time. Continue to pray for each other daily until you meet again.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- Please refer to your weekend service guide for campus-specific announcements.