

Scripture: Haggai 1:7-11.

Theme: How to be a failure -- and how not to be.

Text: Haggai 1:9a -- "you have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little."

Proposition: One is a failure when he neglects God, and not a failure when he gives God due attention.

No. of Cards in these notes: 15

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Places and dates preached:

Grace Methodist Church, Cheyenne, Wyo
April 28, 57. 8:15 & 11:00 a.m.
Montrose, Colo., ~~7~~ 6-28-64.

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Introduction:

1. As a preacher I often get discouraged. There is an old joke that a fellow couldn't decide whether to be a preacher or a politician, so he joined the Methodist ministry and got to be both! But no matter how hard he works, or perhaps because he works hared, the minister displeases many folks, some of whom are pretty vocal about it, and he feels like a failure as both a politician and a preacher. There is some comfort in knowing that the seemingly most successful ministers have had this experience too. Bishop Gerald Kennedy, writing in the April 24, 1957, Christian Century, lists a number of phrases or expressions which he says are used about a minister's work, but which need to be defined. These are the phrases that a man needs to know the real meaning of, he says, and when he does the preacher will surely know the meaning of defeat and failure. Let me give them to you; first the expression, then its definition or real meaning:

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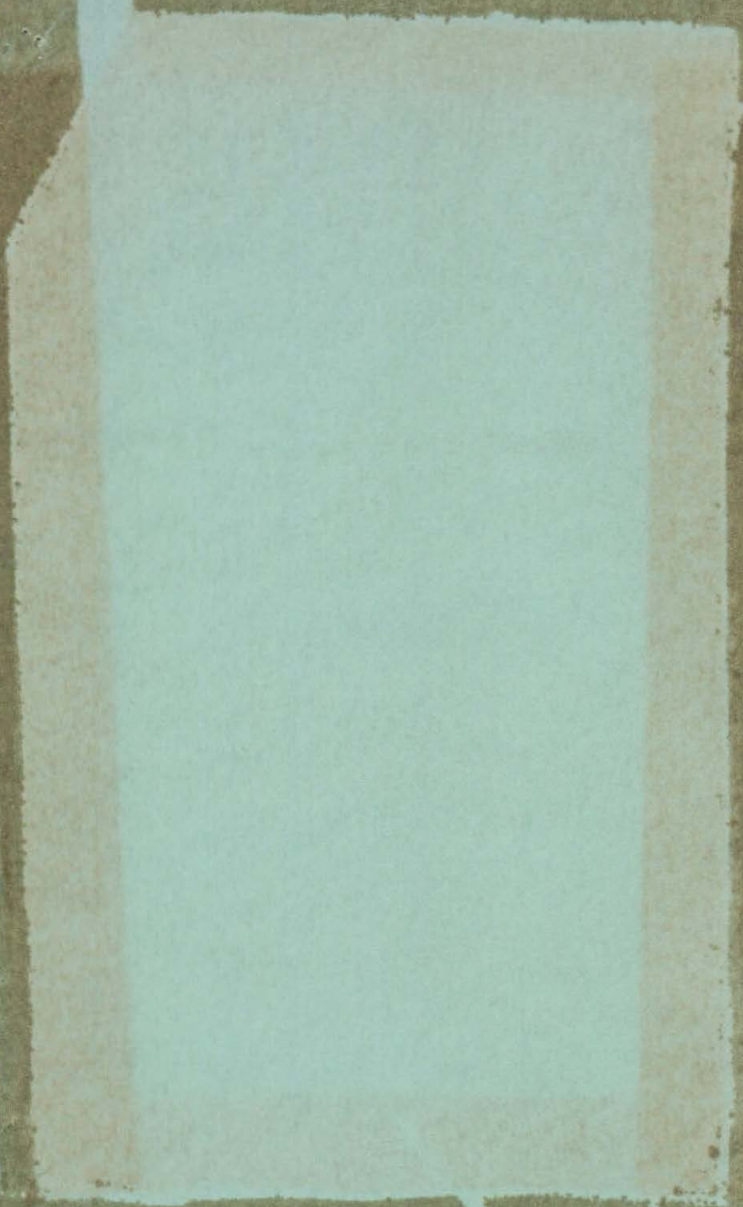
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EXPRESSION DEFINITION

believe in his
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ieve in a fr

He can count on me.
This is none of your business.
I discuss my differences with him in private.
I want my preacher to reveal my prejudices.
I want a word from God.

2.
article, "Some will think this sounds like the words of a tired cynic. Not at all! I have never been more hopeful ~~an~~ about the church nor more appreciative of the privilege of serving it. I simply put these definitions down because they usually apply to one man or to a small minority in the congregation. That is why we need to understand such expressions. Most of our laymen will be saying things like this:

[REDACTED]

3. He concludes: "And even more important to remember is that the large majority of the congregation will say nothing one way or another. They will simply pray for the minister and love him. It is upon them that God, with our help, builds the church."

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4. It is such an ending, stating the truth, that makes my profession a joy and worthwhile, the folks that stand behind you when you are honestly trying in spite of mistakes and failure. And we ministers need the critics, even though it is painful to have them about, to guard us against loafing on the job and to help us avoid mistakes.

5. Our Scripture, Haggai, gives this thought of man finding failure sometimes when his eyes are set upon success. Let us become familiar with the Scripture and its presentation of the thought for today.

I. Our Biblical Book -- its background, content and introduction of our message.

1. The entry of Cyrus, Persian general and emperor, into Babylon in 539 BC was an event which was to have important consequences for the political and religious life of the Jews. For nearly 50 years, from 586 B.C. onward, Palestine had formed part of the Babylonian Empire; and for this same period the Jews who had been taken into exile by Nebuchadrezzar had lived in Babylon, exiled from their homeland. The conquest of Babylon by Cyrus brought the Babylonian empire, of which Palestine was a part, to an end, and made Palestine a part of the Persian

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Empire. It was the policy of Cyrus to conciliate the peoples he conquered, to encourage them to continue their traditional way of worship, and to allow exiles to return home from the lands to which they had been taken. At least some of the Jews took advantage of this policy and returned, beginning the trek to the old land, Palestine, in 537 B.C.

2. The return filled several religious leaders with the hope that the temple, destroyed in 586 B.C., could be rebuilt. However, it was almost twenty years after their return to Palestine before an attempt was made to rebuild the temple. The stone foundations of the temple remained, and through the years the people had become accustomed to worship there, and felt no more need to rebuild it. The burned-out shrine had come to be accepted. Also, the condition of the people was generally pretty wretched. The provision of a roof over their heads was a prime object of existence (1:4); harvests had been bad, food and drink were in short supply, warm clothes were scarce, and money had little value (1:6, 9-10; 2:16-17,19). All the people's energy went to supply their daily physical needs. They were in no mood to undertake a religious duty. It mattered not to them that Yahweh's house had no

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roof on it so long as they had theirs.

3. It was to such a people and at such a time that Haggai came forward as a prophet, with the divine command laid on him to urge the people to rebuild the temple. His task was not an easy one. The time had not yet come to build, the people said. Admittedly, times were hard. But whereas the people saw in these conditions a good reason for indifference, Haggai saw the conditions caused by their indifference. The hard times, he argued, were the result of the prevailing indifference to the claims of religion, and so long as these claims were ignored, so long would their misfortunes continue. The prophet is firm in his insistence that if they will shake off their indifference and build the temple, there will be an end of the hard life. Instead, God will bless the people.

Haggai's words were addressed to Zerubbabel, the civil head of the community and to Joshua, the religious head. They had the desired effect, and under the leadership of these two men the rebuilding of the temple was begun. In 516, four years after Haggai first made his appeal, the temple was completed.

4. Haggai has no claim to be ranked with the great prophets. He had the same ideas many of the great prophets

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held. But he, unlike them, had no great spiritual message. Stone and timber seem to have been as important to him as spiritual ideals. Haggai is, indeed, a minor prophet. Yet, he was a very important figure in Jewish history. Following the exile the temple became the center of Jewish religious and community life. For the fact that there was a restored temple at all to which Jews of this age could go for worship the chief credit must go to Haggai, who persuaded his fellow countrymen, in spite of some ridicule he received for so insisting, to rebuild. Also, Haggai's opposition to the Samaritans (2:10-14) was the beginning of a rigid exclusiveness which became a Jewish characteristic right up to the time of Jesus.

5. Haggai is mentioned in the Old Testament only in this book which bears his name and in Ezra 5:1-6:14. Personal details about him are entirely lacking. No information is given, for example, about his parentage, or as to where he lived. Neither from the Old Testament nor from other sources is anything at all known about the man. "Haggai," the name, means "festal," and probably was given to him by his parents because he was born on a feast day. The birth of a child on such a day was thought to be a favorable sign which deserved to be

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preserved in the name of the child.

6. Haggai's activity as a prophet was of short duration, all his sayings having been given in the course of four months during the reign of King Darius, who reigned over Persia 522-486 B. C., so he prophesied about 520 B. C..

7. Haggai differs from most other prophetic books in the Old Testament in that while the others are mainly collections of prophetic sayings, Haggai is more in the nature of a report on his sayings and on the effect they produced on his hearers. Haggai, therefore, is frequently referred to in the third person. This would suggest that the prophet himself is not the author of the Book in its present form. The sayings are considered by the scholars to be genuine sayings of the prophet, however.

The book falls into five sections which follow one upon the other in chronological order, and each section is exactly dated according to the day and month of the second year of Darius I, in 520 B. C.. The last two sections are dated in the same day.

8. The words which we have chosen as a text seem to point out what might be termed the most "spiritual," or religious message of this book. These

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words are also pretty representative of the complete message of the book, for they point out that without giving God his due in effort and attention, as in the Scripture they were not making an effort to rebuild the temple, man's effort for himself is not satisfying and actually comes to nothing. These words which so effectively summarize the Scriptural book and give us a strong message for today are in the first of verse 9, and are these, "you have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little." Addressed to the Hebrews to suggest that to give self-seeking priority over God-serving is to bring ruin, these words suggest the same message to us.

9. We, too, can demonstrate in modern life that a person or an organization is a failure when he neglects God, and not a failure when he gives God due attention.

II. One is a failure when he neglects God

1. The opposite of a failure is a success. The person who fails doesn't achieve that which he sets out to do. In many things small or large successes and achievements may be accomplished along the way, only to find that the goal when reached was not worth the effort, that life is really a failure.

2. To succeed is to reach ones ultimate ~~goal~~

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goal, to find life satisfying and happy. Common experience and observation points out that many things in which one succeeds, about which one may feel pretty smug or snobbish, often are but steps to disillusionment and final failure. Think of fame as a sign of success. Then ~~it~~ think of it as the cause of countless demands upon a person's energy and time, and it is not always a blessing. Many a famous person has sought desperately to get out of the public eye, and because he couldn't catastrophe, such as a breakdown has hit. Wealth fails to satisfy, to bring real happiness, and is not a sign of success. Many a wealthy person finds himself flattered and catered to by an ever-increasing number of those who have their own share-your-wealth-with-me program, until gradually the suspicion becomes a certainty that the money is more of a curse than a blessing. One can almost understand the Bowery bum who turned down \$40,000 so he could continue the life he knew, his feeling of uneasiness in the presence of so much money. The many divorces of many wealthy folks, the eccentricities of others, the high rate of suicides among the rich, all point up that to find money as the primary object is but to fail. That truth is so, too, for churches as well as people. There are

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things no christian church can do simply for money: such as to give an undue share of attention to those with it; or to overlook conduct in the wealthy who support it that it would not condone in others; or to raise funds by raffles, bingo or other games of chance which encourage the gambling spirit. To do these things with its own enrichment as a goal is for the church to abandon the principles of human value which it cherishes, and thus to fail in its mission and work as a church. To be concerned, ~~for~~ personally, so much over ones own good name, or over the reputation of oneself as derived from ones family, that one loses sight of the neighbors and acquaintances that one can help is to fail. An unjustified pride in oneself, a sort of snobbery, develops when we get too wrapped up in the idea of WHO we are, instead of trying to watch what we are. A success ~~is~~ as a person is not rude toward others simply because he disagrees with them or feels he has been treated badly by them, but is a failure. A successful person is one who tries Christ's standard of doing good even to those who do evil to them.

3. Failure, when seeking success by means of fame, fortune, family background, position or many other methods illustrates that to neglect God is to

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fail. To neglect God, like with the Jews to whom Haggai wrote, brings failure. Perhaps we won't be in a desperate struggle for food, clothing and freedom as were they, but we are failures if we fail to find a satisfactory and purposeful goal and life.

II. Faith in God, evidenced by seeking and doing his commandments, is the way to avoid failure.

1. Haggai probably would be called a success. His concern over the failure to rebuild the temple caused him to write our Scripture urging people to pay more attention to God. The book got results, and the temple was rebuilt, the goal he was after was reached. If he and others found in the rebuilt temple a place to show to God their devotion, to seek God's will in their lives, he was indeed a success. What other motive could he have had?

2. We hope and believe that the reason we strive to ^{to provide} build our own church is to provide a place to worship God, for Christian education and fellowship, so we believe we shall find our lives more nearly successful as we use our building for its intended purposes. We must never forget the purposes and make the building the primary thing to be

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achieved at any cost. We must go ahead and do the right thing at all times regardless of the cost. As we do so we will build good human relations and respect because we are marked in the community mind as a church that does right. Actually, to be such a church is to insure success as a church, and to be otherwise is to insure failure.

3. We have just come through the Easter season. We remember Easter day only because it represented realy and eternal success that came out of one of mankind's worst failures, the death of one executed as a criminal and heretic. The success through failure that was Easter was achieved by One Who lived closer to God than any has before or since.

4. Christ's death and resurrection point out to you and me that on a personal basis we know it true, too, that to do God's will is to avoid failure.

Conclusion:

1. Haggai, in the words "you have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little," points out the failure you or I can be apart from God.

2. Observation in every day life, a look at church goals and purposes, and a memory of Christ's Easter triumph,

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all help us conclude that one is a failure when he neglects God, and not a failure when he gives God due attention. This is "How to be a failure -- and how not to be."

3. As Sarah Knowles Bolton (1841-1916) in Masterpieces of Religious Verse has written: (# 912):

I like the man who faces what he must,
 With step triumphant and a heart of
 cheer;
 Who fights the daily battle without
 fear;
 Sees his hopes fail, yet keeps unfal-
 tering trust
 That God is God, --that somehow, true
 and just
 His plans work out for mortals; not
 a tear
 Is shed when fortune, which the world
 holds dear,
 Falls from his grasp -- better, with
 love, a crust
 Than living in dishonor: envies not,
 Nor loses faith in man; but does his
 best,
 Nor ever murmurs at his humbler lot;
 But, with a smile and words of hope,
 gives zest
 To every toiler: he alone is great
 Who by a life heroic conquers fate.

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Up to the Minute

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION. By Randolph Crump Miller. Scribners, \$3.50.

IN 1950 Prof. Miller of the Yale University divinity school published a book which is widely acclaimed as a contribution to the rethinking of the theological foundations of religious education, *The Clue to Christian Education* (Scribners). That was one of the reactions to the religious liberalism which had characterized the period of the reign of such persons as George Albert Coe, William Clayton Bower, A. J. William Myers and Ernest J. Chave in the field of religious education. The rethinking process can be said to have started with the publication a few years earlier of H. Shelton Smith's *Faith and Nurture*.

teach... ve both a sound Biblical... ology... ght relationship with... Under "Primary": "They are beginning to stand on their own feet and to adjust to the wider world." Under "Third and Fourth Grade": "The danger at this point is that they will come to know Jesus as a man and nothing more!" Under "Juniors": "They live in a secular society where even the greatest feast days of the Christian year are seen through non-religious eyes."

Now there is nothing inaccurate or misleading about any of these statements. It happens that they pertain with equal truth to almost any age. In a sense, by citing such matters, Dr. Miller is being consistent with the developmental view which insists that there is a similarity of experience on every human age level, though the specific application must be made in individuals' terms. In his own words, "the human predicament

EXPRESSION

He is a spiritual preacher.
 He is not a spiritual preacher.
 He brings politics into the pulpit.
 He speaks out with courage.
 He is pink.
 His position will hurt the church.
 His attitude will hurt church finance.

I will not remain in the church.
 He is sowing dissension.
 He must consider his position.
 He is after the money.

He has a great future.
 His ministry is successful.
 He lacks judgment.
 He neglects the substantial members.
 He plays up to the new members.
 He will ruin us financially.
 At least he is a good pastor.
 He disturbs me.
 He upsets my faith.
 The whole church is upset.

DEFINITION

He never disturbs me.
 His message is too relevant.
 I do not agree with him.
 I agree with him.
 He dares to criticize the status quo.
 We reactionaries are displeased.
 I will cut my subscription from 50 cents
 per week to 25.
 If I cannot rule, I'll quit.
 Some people are waking up.
 I want an emasculated citizen in the pulpit.
 He thinks his family should have an Amer-
 ican standard of living.
 He is a politician.
 The church has subscribed the budget.
 He takes Jesus seriously.
 The church is beginning to move.
 He is bypassing the road blocks we set up.
 The tightwads have a guilty conscience.
 He can't preach.
 I am beginning to grow spiritually.
 My prejudices are taking a beating.
 I am causing all the trouble I can.