

Applying It In My Life Group time – 30 minutes

1. The Israelites found themselves distracted over time by personal interests. How do you struggle with misplaced priorities? What are examples of how God's big thing can become our little thing? Why is it so difficult for us on a day-to-day basis to distinguish between the good things and the best thing?
2. The temple held a special place in God's relationship with His people. It was a picture of God's desire to be in close proximity with His people and a reminder of the ever-present problem of sin. What has replaced the temple as a reminder of God's presence in our lives and His provision for our sin? What is the importance of such an "educational tool" in maintaining intimacy in our relationship with God?
3. Haggai twice called upon the people to "give careful thought to their ways." Respond to each of the following questions:
 - Am I building my house or God's house?
 - Are my priorities in proper order?
 - What can I do to make sure God is first in my heart, actions, and schedule?

Prayer TimeGroup time - 15 minutes

Praise God that He is in control of rulers, the circumstances facing His church, and our individual lives. Confess where you have made God's big thing a secondhand concern in your life. Ask God to dwell right in the middle of your life and be so present that the world will see Him alive in you and be drawn to Him.

Finish your prayer time by praying for the needs of those in your *Growth Group*. Take a few minutes to share prayer requests. Share where God has answered any previous prayer requests.

THE STORY *The Long Return Home*

The Return Home

Ezra 1

- God, in His sovereignty, TURNS the heart of Cyrus toward the Jews and their homeland.

Rebuilding the Temple

Ezra 3-6

- The Temple was a picture of God's passion to DWELL among His people.
- The Temple was also a picture of the PROBLEM of our sin.
- You can go home again, but there will always be OPPOSITION.

Misplaced Priorities

Haggai 1-2; Zechariah 1; 8

- You can go home again, but remember to keep FIRST things first.
- God sends seasons of trial and suffering to call His people to His PURPOSES.
- The Gospel was always intended to have RELATIONAL implications .

GROWTH GROUP HOMEWORK

Week of February 17-23, 2014

Getting Started.....Group time - 10 minutes

1. As a child, did you move frequently or did you live in the same place for a long time? What impact did that have on your childhood? What is the farthest distance you have moved either as a child or as an adult? What were the hurdles you faced as you moved and adjusted to a new place?

FOR GROWTH GROUP TIME

Getting Into God's Word..... Group time - 35 minutes

Read *The Story*, Chapter 19 (In preparation to answer questions)

1. Why did God rescue the Israelites from their captivity in Babylon and return them home to Jerusalem? What did the Israelites do to deserve the mercy they received from God? What did God hope would be the result of the Israelites return to Jerusalem?



South Shores Compassion Project

South Shores is partnering with *Y-Malawi* and *World Vision* to bring hope to those struggling with poverty in Malawi. To help us understand the need *World Vision* is providing the *Kisongo Trek*, a first-hand, visual experience of poverty in Africa. Plan on attending this together. It will be at Coast Hills Church in Aliso Viejo from February 28 - March

4. Sign up as a group on our website. Do it NOW!

2. Jeremiah and Isaiah foretold the Persians defeat of Babylon and Cyrus's decree. Read Jeremiah 25:12 & 29:10. How did the Lord fulfill His word spoken by Jeremiah? What happened to the king of Babylon? Read Isaiah 44:28-45:1. How many years had passed between Isaiah's prophecy and Cyrus' edict? What does this teach you about God?
3. After their initial efforts the Israelites got sidetracked from rebuilding God's temple. It was sixteen years before God finally got them back on track. Read Haggai 1:4-11. What had slowed down their work and resolve? What got them up and moving again towards completing the temple?
4. Read Ezra 6:3-12. Tattenai, the governor of the region, wanted to stop the rebuilding of the temple. What did he accuse the Israelites of doing? How does Darius respond to Tattenai's accusations? How did God turn everything upside down and provide for the temple? How do you see the Upper Story breaking into the Lower Story again?
5. Read Zechariah 8:7-13. Zechariah's message was one of hope and promise. What did God promise the faithful Israelites He would do? List the ways they were to respond to God's grace and blessing in their lives? How were the Israelites to be a blessing to the Gentiles around them?