

Returning home

The temple as a divine teaching aid

Sidetracked

Giving careful thought to your ways

Discussion questions:

1. God was pulling some strings in the Upper Story (putting King Cyrus on the throne) so that he could make changes in the Lower Story (set the exiles free). Give an example of a time in your life when you know that God was moving in the Upper Story so that he could accomplish something in your Lower Story.
2. God's big thing can become our little thing if we are not careful. When this happens, we get off track. What are examples of how God's big thing can become our little thing? What can we do to make sure we are really seeking to keep God's big thing on the front burner of our heart and life?
3. When the people of Israel began working on the foundation of the temple (Ezra 4), they met resistance. What kind of conflict and opposition did the people face? When we seek to follow God's will with a passionate heart, what resistance might we face?
4. Eventually, the people got sidetracked from rebuilding God's temple. It was sixteen years before he finally got them back on track (Haggai 1). What slowed down their work and what got them up and moving again?
5. What did God promise the people if they would move forward with his work (Haggai, 2)? How does this bring you hope and inspiration to walk in obedience to God's leading?
6. The end of this chapter of The Story offers a glimpse of the political wrangling that took place behind the scenes. The governor of the region wanted the people to stop building the temple and accused them of having no permission to build it. After communication with the king of Babylon, everything changed (Ezra 5-6). 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?

Homework: Haggai called the people to go up to the hills and gather timber (the supplies they needed to build the temple). Spend a few minutes listing some things you need to "gather" so that you can serve God with all your heart. It might be a new attitude, an altered schedule, a tender heart, or a generous lifestyle. Then commit to "gather" these things so that you can build a new future with God right in the center.

For next week, please read Chapter 20 of The Story (Esther 1-9).