

# **The Fantasy of A Quick and Easy Success**

by J. Paul Tanner, PhD

Do you ever find yourself fantasizing a make-believe world in which everything comes easy and all your efforts turn to success? Take Andrew for instance. Andrew was a bright young graduate of the university. With a bachelor's degree in computer science and an MBA, it seemed that the only way for him to go was up. He quickly joined an established computer firm that was launching several new chip making plants in strategic areas of East Asia. Arriving at work in a shiny car, equipped with the latest model handphone, neatly dressed in tailor-made clothes and fashionable ties, he was proud to work in an environment of like-minded professionals. Weekend leisure included excellent dining at the club with friends and business associates. Everything in his environment was clean . . . organized . . . a monument to human achievement.

The young executive living the corporate dream cannot help but appeal to us. Most of us are wise enough, however, to realize that there is more fantasy to that than reality. Notable achievements (especially ones of eternal value) more often emerge from faithful labor under difficult circumstances of a less than perfect environment. Often we look at our day to day world, and sense more frustration than fulfillment. Discouragement becomes our close companion as the grains of sand sift unrelentingly through the hour glass. Where can we turn in these moments to derive the motivation that will make our daily grind turn from bitter drudgery to that elation of being carried on the wings of eagles?

The Old Testament Israelites of Haggai's day went through the same process. These were the ones who returned from the Babylonian exile after 538 BC to find their land and cities destroyed and the once glorious temple of King Solomon in ruins. These were hard times . . . harder than most of us ever face. Through the prophet Haggai's exhortation, the people mustered enough energy to begin rebuilding their shattered dreams. A new temple began to rise from the rubble and dusty ruins, yet as it did a somber mood of despair crept through the hearts of the people. What emerged was not a temple like they remembered . . . not like the one in Solomon's day. Their work, as earnest as it had been, did not immediately result in a monument of grandeur. No, not by any measure. The people bemoaned their efforts that seemed to wreak of vanity, as disgusting as three-day old clothes with a stench of filthy sweat. Even their leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, hung their heads dishearteningly at the immensity of the task and the slow progress that came forth. Nothing glorious here!

In such a moment, the Word of God through the lips of Haggai was so *à propos*. "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison? But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' says the LORD of hosts" (Haggai 2:3-4). In the same paragraph, God went on to declare that He would one day bring about a great work from their feeble efforts of the present: "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I shall give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts" (2:9). That rickety temple of Haggai's day may not have looked like much, but God had plans for their work . . . plans beyond their wildest imagination . . . plans that would include the coming of Messiah Jesus who would build the *greater temple* and bring about the long awaited time of *Shalom* (God's peace).

Do you ever wonder where history would be if men of faith had abandoned their God-given dreams too early? Sure it's hard when you have so little to work with and the climb seems all up-hill. But that's when we need to remind ourselves that what God calls us to (which always has eternal value), there He also promises us "take courage . . . for I am with you." I do not know how you feel, but I would rather be in a trench with Jesus, my clothes soiled from head to foot, than to bask in all the accolades and amenities of the "corporate success story." So, how about it, can you and I take courage and get back to work? If what we are building has a future, we can suffer the momentary inconveniences, discomforts and fatigue!