Vision and Leadership

Third in the series: Christian Leadership

# Key Thought: Where there is no vision among God's people, their light grows dim and people perish.

# Scriptures: Prov. 29:18; 2 Sam. 5:1-12; 2 Tim. 1:1-14

# Intro:

Today I have brought a couple items to remind us of our key word for today. I brought a pair of eyeglasses which we use to improve our physical vision. I brought a pair of binoculars which we use to help us see at a distance. I found an old camera to remind us of how we store pictures to help us remember what we have seen. We can easily relate all these items to the word “vision.”

# What is vision?

## Defining “vision”

There are several ways that the term “vision” is used in English.

* The most common meaning, of course just has to do with our eyesight. We say, “I have good vision.” We mean simply that we see well.
* Another definition of the word “vision” refers to something seen in a dream or trance or mystical experience where a person sees an image in their mind. The term was used this way in referring the revelation that the prophets of the Old Testament received. In fact, for this reason, sometimes the OT prophets were called “seers” because they saw visions and then described what they saw to the people in their prophecies. There is a famous quote from Proverbs that uses the word “vision” in this way.

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.
Prov 29:18 KJV

The NRSV reflects the relationship between the prophets’ visions and OT prophecy in its translation:

Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law. Prov 29:18 NRSV

* A third meaning of the word refers to having a mental picture of something that is not yet happening—a mental picture of a preferred future. We might observe, “He had a vision to double the sales of his company.” Or, “She had a vision to become a doctor.”

Often the OT proverb has been quoted with this third meaning in mind, “Where there is no vision, the people perish,” meaning, “Where the leaders do not see a picture of a desired future for that organization, the organization eventually fails.”

The question is this, “Given that putting this third meaning of the word “vision” in the quote is not exactly the original intent of the famous Proverbs verse, is it still a good use of the concept?” Could it be a proper implication from the original verse? When the organization being discussed is the Church of Jesus Christ, I think it is a good follow-through on the implications of the original intent. We just need to keep in mind that it is God’s revelation that is the original vision, not the specific plans that we envision to promulgate or promote the Gospel.

## Vision and leaders

So, let’s return to our first question and put it in the context of this message series. What is vision as it relates to leaders? In simple terms, a vision is a mental picture of a desired future.

Some of you remember a Democratic leader who became the 38th Vice-President of the United States, serving from 1965-1969. His name was Hubert H. Humphrey.

In 1935 he was working in his father’s drug store concocting medicines for people and for the pigs of the local farmers. After his first visit to Washington DC in 1935, Hubert Humphrey wrote to his wife whom he had married the year before, “Becky, I can see how some day if you and I just apply ourselves, and make up our minds to work for bigger things, we can some day live in Washington and probably be in government, politics or service….. Oh, I hope my dream comes true. I’m going to try anyhow.”

That vision to serve in government guided him to further his education, to be involved in Minnesota politics, eventually to be mayor of Minneapolis, then senator from Minnesota, and then Vice President of the United States. Eventually he ran for President and was defeated by Richard Nixon. He returned to Senate where he served until his death.

Incidentally, while in Minnesota, he was also an active Methodist layperson and Boy Scout leader.

He had a vision for his life at a relatively young age. It was a vision for service to others and especially for political service to his city, his state and his country. His vision propelled him forward. There were some failures along the way, but he kept at it and found success.

Hubert Humphrey’s life story illustrates our definition of vision; a vision is a mental picture of a desired future. His story also shows the power of a good vision. It can be a vision for ourselves, for our family or for our group.

## David’s Vision

King David’s vision was to make the city of Jerusalem his capital city. Why was this his vision? There were probably many reasons. For one, it was a fortress city on a hill later called Mt. Zion. For another, if his capital were to be in Jerusalem rather than in Hebron where it had been, he would be more centrally located and more identified with the whole kingdom rather than just one tribe. Third, we get a hint in the Genesis narrative regarding Abraham that Jerusalem had been a special place of worship of God for some time. When the city was called Salem (also Ps. 76:2), Abraham gave tithes to a priest there called Melchizedek who was priest of “God Most High (El-Elyon).” This sacred appellation was one of the names applied to God in several places in the OT (Num. 24:16; Deut. 32:8; 2 Sam.22:14; Ps. 7:17; Ps, 46:4; Ps. 47:2; Ps. 92:1 as examples). (I note that several of these Scripture references are in contexts relating to Jerusalem and to the sanctuary there.) An adjacent hill called Moriah had been the place where Abraham had brought his son Isaac to obey God’s testing command for sacrifice, only to be prevented and have a ram substituted in Isaac’s place (ZEPB). It seems highly likely that David wanted to be identified with the worship tradition of the great city of Jerusalem too. His dream was to bring the ark of the Covenant which was in Hebron with him to Jerusalem, thus bringing greater unity to the worship traditions of Israel as well. After David took Jerusalem, 2 Samuel 6 records how David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. God had given David a great vision for the unity of Israel.

# What happens without Vision?

## Without God’s revelation, people perish

A good question to ask is this. What happens without a vision? I recently completed a devotional on the YouVersion Bible App with the unlikely title “Chazown.” I learned that the title is the Hebrew word for vision which is found in the verse in Proverbs that I quoted. The devotional was condensed or extracted from a book of the same title by a prominent pastor today named Craig Groeschel. Here is Pastor Craig’s profound reflection on what happens without a vision.

Where there is no "chazown" – no dream, no revelation, no vision, no sense of our created purpose – we perish.

Where there is no vision that you were created to have a growing personal relationship with your creator, your inner being withers and dies.

Where there is no vision for a godly family, you have a 50% chance of ending up divorced.

Where there is no vision that your body is the temple of God's spirit – property on loan from him – your physical health slips away.

Where there is no vision for a financially wise lifestyle, you can live in the richest country on earth and still be drowning in debt.

Where there is no vision for meaningful work – people live for 5 o'clock. They really just exist. Their goal is to survive – to pay bills – stay married – keep the kids out of jail…

But you and I were made for so much more.

Pastor Craig Groeschel in Chazown – A Devotional on YouVersion Bible App taken from his book of the same title.

## Without a vision people wander aimlessly.

Without vision, people tend to live life for the moment. They don’t have a sense of direction or purpose.

Dr. Kenneth Hildebrand put it this way.

Recently a friend referred to a person as a ‘mundane man.’ The phrase intrigued me and set me thinking. The mundane man, as I view it, is the man who believes only what he sees, only what is immediate, only what he can put his hands on. He may be a truck driver, a banker, a college president, a clerk, or a junk dealer – his occupation doesn’t matter. The mundane man lacks depth. He lacks vision. The poorest of all men is not the one without a nickel to his name. He is the fellow without a dream.

The mundane man resembles a great ship made for the mighty ocean but trying to navigate in the mill pond. He has no far ports to reach, no lifting horizon, no precious cargo to carry. His hours are absorbed in routine and petty tyrannies. Small wonder if he gets the satisfied and quarrelsome and ‘fed up.’ One of life’s greatest tragedies is a person with a 10 x 12 capacity and a 2 x 4 soul. -Dr. Kenneth Hildebrand

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## Without a vision, little is accomplished

Since our lives are not focused toward goals, we tend to squander our energies, usually in the search for immediate pleasures. Missionary leader Wesley Duewel explained it this way;

Without vision you are in danger of drifting with the current. Without vision you will not rouse your latent abilities into sanctified service for God and others. Without vision your life will not impact your world, you will never become the person God created you to be and saved you to be. Wesley L. Duewel in Measure Your Life p. 207

# How does faith influence vision?

## God gives us purpose

### The first way that following Jesus gives us purpose is by inviting us to participate in God’s purposes for the world.

When he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection from the dead, in the upper room, Jesus said to them,

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you John 20:21

One of the consequences of this command is that all Christians have a job to do, they have an overriding purpose for their lives. They are appointed to do the works of Jesus in the corner where the live—to bring his love to those they touch, to tell his story whenever they can, to do his works of kindness, to speak for justice for the oppressed, to preach the Good News of forgiveness, to help meet the needs of the poor, to disciple others on the road to spiritual life. We have a huge vision from God for our lives. Christians can never wander aimlessly without direction. They are working for the Master on a grand task that he has assigned. And we will give an account someday.

### The second way is by giving us person purposes for every day

But it is one thing to say this about the grand scheme of things and another to drill it down to every day for each person. I would go further on the basis of what the Bible says and declare that God has specific purposes for Christians for every day of their lives. Do you remember what Paul taught?

We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Eph 2:10

So, God has good works prepared in advance for you and me to do every day of our lives and he has given us his Holy Spirit to guide us into them. Sometimes those good works are very specific such as call a friend to encourage them or visit an elderly relative. Other times the good works are large visions that we need to pay attention to every day. For example:

As I was reflecting on this message, I thought about one example of a daily purpose that God has given us. From the Garden of Eden, God established the family (Gen. 2:21-25). In Deuteronomy 6:4-9 God affirms the purpose of parents training children. In Psalm 145:4 we see each generation commending God’s works to those that follow.

I’m afraid that the importance and centrality of family and raising children as a purpose is very underrated in our society today. People do not have a vision for a strong family, a close family, even a supportive family. One evidence, stats say that we, as a society, are postponing marriage later and later, sometimes until it is almost too late to have children, because we are giving our younger years to what society values more highly--things like extended education, careers, travels, and pleasures. There’s nothing wrong with extended education, careers, travels or pleasure – it’s the relative value that I question. Economically, I observe that we collectively tend to overinvest in things and underinvest in time with our children. What we need or want requires so much work time that we must greatly cut time with our children to get it. Parents know there is always a trade-off between providing and spending time with children. But wise parents are always working to minimize the trade-off and value time with the spouse and children. I note that the more adult family members that can help with this time equation, the better usually. Divorce makes the time equation so much worse. Complicating things further, the job market combined with the values of our society and the possibilities of things like summer and winter homes mean that more and more frequently the generations are separated by distances too. On the margins, we wonder why both young and old are having greater trouble with substance abuse, depression, etc. One big reason may be that the God-given vision and purpose of family as a driver for daily life is missing or greatly diminished for many of them.

God has purposes for every day of our lives.

## Having faith enlarges our vision

What is more, God wants you to catch a vision that is bigger than what you can do! There are two reasons for this.

* First, if you have a vision that you can accomplish by yourself, it requires no faith. You do not need God's help. You are selling your possibilities short by not including God’s help and direction.

God wants you to see beyond the visible. The stark reality of the visible before you may strike fear into your heart. But there is a greater reality – God. The visible may fill your horizon with duties, limitations, and problems. God wants to lift your horizon and show you new vistas of what he can do. He does not deny the facts of your present circumstances. He adds his new greater facts to bring you to his tomorrow. Wesley L. Duewel in Measure Your Life p. 209

* Second, if you have a vision that you can do by yourself, you bring no one else along. No one learns from you. And you are not accomplishing as much as you could if your vision included others. God’s goal for us is to have a vision that is big enough that it will require more than just ourselves for its fulfillment. This is how the vision is carried to the next generation. This is how much more is accomplished too. A person who can only work alone may be a genius and a hard worker, but they can only do what one person can do. But a person who works together with others on a shared vison can accomplish what a group can do together.

Pastor Robert Lewis of Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock Arkansas had a vision that the Church of Jesus Christ needed to be a “community of people who stand firm in the truth… And who present living proof of a loving God to a watching world.” The church needed to “balance public proclamation with congregational incarnation.” It needed to build a bridge to its society, a bridge that was “suspended by the steel cables of the Great Commandment as well as the Great Commission.” (The Church of Irresistible Influence by Robert Lewis pages 40, 41). The church redesigned its small group ministry so that people “graduated” from Bible Study groups to “Common Cause” groups, that is ministry groups that did the hands-on work of ministry. After all, the objective of discipleship is not just to know more but to be equipped for ministry, right?

Here are some of the Common Cause ministry small groups.

Celebrate recovery, crisis pregnancy center support; Crown ministry stewardship teaching; death ministry; disaster follow-up; divorce care; Habitat for Humanity group; Honduras mission support; newlywed mentors; nursing home support; one-to-one evangelism; upward basketball. (The Church of Irresistible Influence by Robert Lewis pages 81-85).

But Pastor Robert Lewis, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, felt that his vision was too small. The city of Little Rock was way too big to be impacted for the Gospel only by one church with this vision. So, he approached the Ministerial Association with his vision. He wanted to do a weekend “Sharefest” where all the churches would do something practical together in the community. At first, he was rejected--hard to imagine it, but he was. Yet over time, he kept that vision in his heart and eventually God created the opportunity. Several other churches joined in the first “Sharefest” weekend.

First Assembly of God in North Little Rock caught the vision from Pastor Robert Lewis. They decided to adopt a neglected elementary school in Little Rock. After having received proper permissions, the church used its own resources and volunteers to do a significant remodel and resupply job for the teachers and students at that school. They donated thousands of dollars and recruited thousands more dollars in donations from businesses. The community was astounded. Principal Diane Crites said, “I think this is the most fabulous day of my life as far as education is concerned. I’ve been in this 29 years, and this is the first time a community or church project has come through for us.” First Assembly put its motivation for the project on a banner in the front of the school for that weekend. The banner read, “Because we care: Love one another as I have loved you. John 13:34” The church wanted to do work at another school the following year but so many people wanted to help that the leaders were considering selecting two schools. (The Church of Irresistible Influence by Robert Lewis pages 167,168).

Friends, that is the kind of thing faith does with vision! When we are walking with God, He enlarges our vision. He blesses others through it. And he gives us purposes that fulfill us. Living Christian faith puts the life of God into the vision!

# What is the leader's role regarding vision?

Leaders are visionary people. It’s who they are; it’s what that do. But its good to ask what the leader’s role is regarding vision. It used to be popular to think about the leader as getting a vision and then selling it to everyone else. Well, sometimes it happens that way. But I do not think that is the best way in organizations like churches. So, what is the leader’s role? Allow me to suggest five key parts of the leader’s role.

* The leader helps the group understand the current circumstances. He or she is active in framing the situation, so the group gets perspective for shaping the vision.
* The leader guides the group in forming a desired picture of a preferred future. The leader’s understanding of people and of group processes helps in this process. The leader and the group together shape the future of the organization. Usually the leader works with other key group leaders.
* The leader helps the group navigate from where they are to where they desire to go. Progress is made step by step over a period of time. Focus and patience are required. Unforeseen obstacles may need to be overcome.
* The leader helps the group celebrate milestones. Putting emphasis upon the right accomplishments helps the group remain inspired and focused. What gets noticed gets repeated.
* The Christian leader keeps the group praying and connects the group vision with the Great Commandments and the Great Commission. It is easy to work on something just for the sake of organizational preservation or, heaven forbid, for the glory of the leader. But those lesser motives will undermine effectiveness. From a spiritual perspective, the leader’s job is to safeguard the spiritual motives of the whole vision. Is this vision truly an outworking of the vision of Jesus for his church? Will this vision advance the cause of Jesus? Will the process as well as the purpose glorify Jesus?

# Conclusion

What is vision?

I close with a short story from Chuck Colson’s book, The Body

The young people at Shively Christian church, led at the time by Youth Pastor Dave Stone, were fiercely competitive with their neighbor, Shively Baptist, in all things, especially softball. They were also serious about their Christianity, faithfully attending the summer Bible camp led by their youth pastor.

One week the Bible lesson was about Jesus washing his disciples’ feet, from John 13. To make the servanthood lesson stick, Pastor Stone divided the kids into groups and told them to go out and find a practical way to be servants.

“I want you to be Jesus in the city for the next two hours,” he said. “If Jesus were here, what would he do? Figure out how he would help people.”

Two hours later the kids reconvened in Pastor Stone’s living room to report what they had done.

One group had done two hours of yard work for an elderly man. Another group bought ice cream treats and delivered them to several widows in the church. A third group visited a church member in the hospital and gave him a card. Another group went to a nursing home and sang Christmas carols – yes, Christmas carols in the middle of August. One elderly resident remarked that it was the warmest Christmas she could remember.

But when the fifth group stood up and reported what they had done, everyone groaned. This group had made its way to none other than their archrival, Shively Baptist, where they had asked the pastor if he knew someone who needed help. The pastor sent them to the home of an elderly woman who needed yard work done. There for two hours, they mowed grass, raked the yard, and trimmed the hedges.

When they were getting ready to leave, the woman called the group together and thanked them for their hard work. “I don’t know how I could get along without you,” she told him. “You kids at Shively Baptist are always coming to my rescue.”

“Shively Baptist!” interrupted Pastor Stone. “I sure hope you set her straight and told her you were from Shively Christian church!”

“Why, no, we didn’t,” the kids said. “We didn’t think it mattered.”

And, of course, it didn’t. (The Body by Charles Colson p. 113)

The vision of Jesus had triumphed! May it be so with us as well!