

The Value of a Vision

Reflections on Acts 26:12-32, Ecc. 5,6

Based in part on Matt Heard's sermon given 10/5/2002

My number one priority in life is to be obedient to God's vision for me.

- A vision for my life helps me understand where I am today, where I am going tomorrow, and what I need to be doing on the way.
- To pursue my vision, I must be willing to pay the price, to repent from my past activities that are not directed toward that vision, and to prove my repentance by my deeds. In other words, to pursue my vision, I must be willing to work hard today to prepare for what I may be called to do tomorrow.
- A vision shines a light that enables me to choose the right path of refinement. God refines me through testing and trials. And so the process of refinement involves a willingness to take risks, to fully commit to the vision God has given me, and to properly deal with opposition and difficult circumstances. I must be willing to fail repeatedly if I am to fulfill the vision.
- If I take decisive action in the direction of my vision, then God will empower me – it doesn't work the other way around. God will not enable me to act or to choose, but He will facilitate and direct my path once I begin the journey (Prov. 16:9). God's power is always directed to His own glory and the good of his people, and those two things are never in conflict (Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*). But God's power is never directed to attaining my personal agenda apart from His glory (Psalms 62 and 63).
- Vision instills passion and motivation. Without a vision I tend to become lazy, distracted, indifferent, and unfocused. My energies and efforts are squandered when they are not directed toward a specific goal. I become a wandering generality.
- Pursuing a vision that is larger than me, stronger than me, greater than me, brings me contentment even if that vision is never achieved. The confidence and delight that I'm on the right path, doing what I've been called to do, is the natural byproduct of the pursuit of a vision. As long as I am pursuing, I am not a failing.
- My vision is to continually increase my knowledge of God by continually growing in character: in integrity, trustworthiness, discernment, wisdom, honesty, compassion, generosity, service, obedience, and love. These are part of the character of God.

The things I do to earn a living, to contribute to my community, to keep my home, to nurture my family, to build God's church, and all the other activities that fill my days, only create a training ground for that growth. These things must never be ends in themselves because they will all pass away. If there is a legacy from my life, it is passing on a way to live in harmony with God, not a vain and meaningless accumulation of the things of this world. My primary relationship in this world and in the next is with God my Creator and Savior. My primary dependence is on God my Provider. My primary identity is found in God my Father. I am his dearly beloved child. And I am but dust and ashes.

Being overly introspective is not a good thing. On the other hand, Socrates once said that the unexamined life probably isn't worth living. Let's take an assessment. Compare the following statement of a vision with the final bullet on the previous page. What is different about these personal attributes from the ones dealing with character?

I want to continually grow in strength, beauty, confidence, security, knowledge, skill, wealth, fame, power, happiness, acceptance, and excitement.

What is the difference between being cynical and being realistic, or between being fatalistic and completely trusting in God's sovereignty? Give some examples.

Are you generally an optimist, or a pessimist? How does it affect your behavior?

What does it mean to be "ambitious?" Is it a good thing or a bad thing? Why or why not?

What does it mean to be "successful?" Is it desirable, quantifiable, and objective? Or is it prideful, ambiguous, and subjective? What does your definition of success have to do with your behavior, your self-image, and your attitude toward others?

Do you personally believe you are successful in various areas of your life? Are you successful overall? Why or why not?

Is competition a good thing or a bad thing? Do grades in school matter? Do we help or harm by giving athletic and scholarship awards? Is envy the natural outcome of competition? Or is honor the natural outcome of competition? Why do you believe that?

If we never try, we can never fail. However, if we never try, we can never succeed either. What risks have you taken this year? What cost did you pay in your attempt to succeed at something? What did you learn?

Goals are things that are 100% under your control. Visions, however, must be greater than you can accomplish on your own. They need to be supernatural. They need to be God-given and God-dependent.

- What are some of your current goals?
- What vision are you currently pursuing?
- Do your current goals lead you toward your vision? If not, or if you have no current vision for your life, what do you hope to accomplish by the goals you have set?
- If you haven't set any current goals, what are you using to select your priorities for investing your time and money?

How can you be ambitious, in pursuit of success, goal-oriented, and vision-driven, and yet not set your heart on the things of this world? Ps. 62:10: "though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them."

God empowers us to enjoy or not to enjoy the things of this life, though they be much or little (Ecc. 5:18, 6:2). How do you enjoy what God has given you? How do you consume His gifts to you? Are you satisfied and content, or dissatisfied and anxious? Why?

Personal thoughts: We need to build faith in 3 things: faith in God (that He is a loving and trustworthy being), faith in the Church (that we are being taught correctly), and faith in ourselves (that we *deserve* success and are worthy of love). We are not supposed to have faith in ourselves as personally capable. It is more of a *dependent* faith, an acknowledgment that we *cannot* grow on our own. It requires an act of God. We are confident in Him. And in that confidence we step out, acting on faith that what has been promised will be fulfilled. Satan's ploy to undermine our faith is to make us doubt that God has made any such promise of success, or that we deserve any such honor or reward. That promise is what we've got to shield and to guard.

There are promises in Scripture that we must identify and cling to when sight belies what we know is True. We are *not* to act as if we are filled with unbelief, or doubt, or impotence. That is a rejection of God's providence and sovereignty over all people and circumstances. Worse, it's a rejection of His unconditional and unreserved love for us.

The Voice of God - we hear our Shepherd's voice and we follow (John 10:27). We reject any voice of doubt or fear. We follow our Shepherd because we know his voice is going to guide us to safety, shelter, and nourishment. God desires prosperity for his people (Gen. 32:12; Dt. 5:33; Prov. 28:25; Jer. 29:7-12). He wants us to multiply and rule the earth, to subdue it in His name, and to live in harmony and righteousness. If we're afraid, and we listen closely, we will hear God say, "I didn't create you shy or afraid or insecure. You listened to *lies*. You've got to find the *truth*." God had a *dream*: it's you.

God's intent for us in the world – Noah was told in Gen. 9 "Every living creature will live in fear and dread of you. They will be food for you. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." In Joshua, God's promise to his people was that He would drive out the inhabitants of the land before them, that His people might live in houses they did not build, eating from trees they did not plant (Josh. 24:13). *We're in a war for dominion*. The earth will either be ruled by the Sons of God, or by the Sons of men. We have a mandate to take dominion over the earth. But the weapons of this war of conquest are spiritual, not physical. We fight against principalities and powers, not flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12-18). It is a destiny, a calling, a commitment, and an obligation of every child of God to stand firm and occupy the land that God has given us. It is our rightful inheritance that we lay claim to, to the praise and glory of God Almighty.

Our use of Time – We don't *have* any "spare" time. All our time needs to be *allocated* -- every nook and cranny. We can't build the kingdom part-time. It takes a full-time commitment.

The Vision – You identify it. You quantify. You need it. You vividly imagine it. You enthusiastically talk about it. And then you make it a matter of life and death to achieve.

God will prosper you *as* your soul prospers – your soul prospers when you obey His word. Love his people and use his money. Don't use his people and love his money.
3 John 2.

Need x Faith = Motivation. Identify your need, then build your faith. You build your faith through increased knowledge and through action. Action is the by-product of motivation. This is a dynamic relationship. Motivation leads to action, which satisfies your need, which increases your faith, which motivates you to further action.

On the other hand, inaction weakens knowledge, which depletes faith, which destroys motivation, and stops further action. In the same way, if you don't identify your needs clearly and precisely, the extent of your faith is irrelevant. Zero need times infinite faith equals zero motivation. Without a clearly defined *need*, you'll never have enough motivation to take any action. Hint.

Psalm 119:113. I hate the double-minded (fence-sitters). "You are my hiding place and my *shield*. I have put my hope in your word." God is my cover in my daily battles. He is my defender and protector. He is the guarantor of His own promise. Whom shall I fear?

James 1:6-8 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, *unstable* in all he does.

John 14:12-15 If you believe in me, **you will do what I do**. What you ask for in my name (for my sake) I will do it – and if you love me, obey me.

Question: What does Jesus do that I am to do as well?

Answer: Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable Year of the Lord.

And what is it that I am to obey?

Answer: John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. "

And now, here is the promise:

Mark 11:23-24 "Whoever believes that the things he *says* will be done, will *have* whatever he says. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."

Literally it reads, "The one who says to this rise, 'Away! Be in the sea.' and does not hesitate or doubt in his heart, but instead has faith that what he says will become, it will be to him. Therefore, I set out for you that as much as you ask in prayer, trust that you lay hold of it, and to you it will be."

The *condition* of this promise is contained in John 15:7,10 -- If we abide in Christ by obeying his commands, we will have whatever we ask for. The *context* of this promise is becoming fruitful to God's glory, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." Joh 15:8

My obligation is to ensure that I speak only what I believe, that I believe only what God has promised, and that I act in accordance with what I have said. God then can bless what I have said, and what I have done, so that I can afford him all the glory and honor that is due Him. But if I remain silent about my intent, or I fail to act out my intent, or I doubt what the results of my actions will be, then God cannot bless my silence, or my inaction, or my willful unbelief. God will give me only as much as my belief allows, and my own words and deeds declare the extent of my belief.

As Christ is, so are we in the world.

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:17-19 NKJV

The Dream

I believe a dream is the thing that enables us to pursue the image of who we were meant to be, and the thing that enables us to make full use of the provisions God has currently placed at our disposal for that purpose.

I find that I've been a confused thinker for a long time. The first hint that I had no idea how to dream came while listening to a motivational tape. The speaker said that we shouldn't confuse the dream with the reward. We need to see the dream clearly, set goals to pursue that dream, and then reward ourselves when we reach the goal. Cars, houses, money, and fame are rewards for reaching our goals - they are not the goals. If they are, then we have set our heart on them (Ps. 62:10).

In reading John C. Maxwell's books I discovered that our usual definition of success may be inadequate. If success is "the progressive realization of a worthwhile goal" then when we finally reach that goal, we have to set another one for ourselves. Success becomes a temporary thing. And that puts us on a roller coaster. But a lifetime pursuit actually involves the progressive realization of an image, not a goal. And that image is not just of ourselves as we want to be, but of the world in which we want to live. It should be something that stretches us and forces us to grow, and therefore it may be something that we never attain. When Olympic athlete Marion Jones set a goal for herself of 5 gold medals in track and field, everyone said how arrogant she was. She replied, "I'm shooting for it even though I may not achieve it. If all I get is 4 out of 5, that will be something special." We need to set our sights high so that we grow more, and so that we accomplish more than we would if we set our sights low.

I have a plaque on my wall that talks about striving for greatness. It says, "Use every letter you write, every conversation you have, every meeting you attend, to express your fundamental beliefs and dreams. Affirm to others the vision of the world you want. You are an immensely powerful source of life and goodness. Affirm it. Spread it. Radiate it. Think day and night about it, and you will see a miracle happen: the Greatness of your own life." Do you think that's over the top? Is it a little too ego-centric?

God didn't make us to be mediocre. He designed us for greatness. Too often we refuse to believe that, and we refuse to think and behave as if it were true. We think it is egotistical, or prideful. Misunderstood, it could be just that. But John Maxwell, in his book "The Success Journey" talks about the dream being something grand enough to include others - an expression of joy, love, and compassion - a magnificent quest like Don Quixote.

The dream is an image of,

- Our self, as we want to be;
- Our family enjoying each other's company, as we want it to be;
- Our community caring for its weakest and most vulnerable members, as we want it to be;
- Our nation abiding by a standard of integrity and morality, as we want it to be;
- Our world becoming a safe and encouraging place in which to live and thrive, for ourselves and for our children - as we want it to be, and as a legacy for generations yet to be born.

These visions, these images of our possibilities, are things that we may never achieve, but we can pursue them with every ounce of courage and determination in our soul. We can gather and expend every resource at our disposal to make these images a reality.

What God has made in His image in us is the ability to see things that are not yet, and then to speak them into existence, to create them. Don't confuse this with some Name-it-and-claim-it claptrap. Words are very powerful. They are reflections in the tangible world of thoughts that are only contained in the intangible mind. Words can change the heart of a nation, the outcome of conflict, and the course of history. They can bring life, or they can bring death (Prov 18:21). We are commanded to think wholesome thoughts (2Pet. 13:1), speak wholesome words (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), and to build each other up (1Cor. 14:12; 1Thess 5:11).

Let me ask you: what do you see for yourself, your family, your community, your nation, and your world? If you and I will master our fear, we can make it happen. We can turn the images in our mind into fruitful reality. If we want it bad enough, we can create a whole New World around us. What do you see? Once you have that image clearly in your head, you can begin to talk about how you want to reward yourself as you reach each progressive goal along your journey.