

Visionary Elders

Detailed Outline

Part 2 of 3

Introduction

Ask any child what he or she wants to be when grown up, and invariably they have an answer—and often a noble one at that. Every child has a dream; that is how we are designed. It is not much later that life happens, and these visions of greatness disappear like mist on a hot sunny day.

This fading of a dream is unfortunately one of the fallouts of our fallenness. Thankfully, though, in Jesus Christ we can once again dream, hope, and believe in a bright future.

So let us talk about the future. In this part we will talk about the biblical basis of visioning, and how visioning can help a local church stay focused on the Lord.

I. What is a “Vision”?

Not sure if you noticed, but the term “vision” is an oxymoron. What do I mean by that?

Vision, generally speaking, is about the ability to see things; and yet we use this term now to discuss things that are *not* seen—“an image of the future.”

A. Definition

If we were to answer the question, “What is vision?” it would be “An ability to define the unseen future.”

In the context of the local church, therefore, vision is a mental image of the future, and I strongly believe it is an image as prompted by God.

Because vision deals with the future, at the very least, it provides hope, trust, and confidence.

1. Hope in God’s plans (Jer. 29:11)
2. Trust in God’s leading (Prov. 3:5)
3. Confidence in his ability (2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Thess. 5: 24)

B. Clarifying misunderstanding

1. Misquoted verse
 - a) Probably the most misquoted Bible reference to indicate the need for a vision is:
“Where [there is] no vision, the people perish . . .” (Prov. 29:18 KJV)
 - b) This verse has nothing to do with the vision of the future. It becomes apparent as we read the rest of the verse. It refers to the Word of God and its life-giving revelation.
 - c) In fact, if we are looking for support verses for the concept of visioning, we will be disappointed. There is no one explicit verse that supports the need for vision casting.

2. Misunderstood word

- a) It is important that we do not confuse a *dream* or *visions* that we read about in the Bible with *visioning*. The first is a revelation, a prophecy, or a divine sign; and the second is about the image of the future.
- b) The idea here is not to confuse a homonym with a synonym. They are two words that spell and sound the same, but have two different meanings.

3. Dream vs. Vision

- a) While on this topic it is important to differentiate between a dream and a vision. This again is not about the biblical references as in Joel or Acts 2.
- b) This is about the dream of the future that some people talk about. In this context then, "Vision is a dream on wheels."
- c) What that means, is that vision is a verb. It is about taking action to make the dream a reality.
- d) We read in John 4 Jesus talking to his disciples:
"Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!"
(John 4:35b NKJV)
- e) It is implied that as a result of looking up and seeing the fields there is a requirement for action. Therefore, the passage goes on to say:
"... The one who reaps draws a wage ..." (v. 36)
- f) Another example is where the story doesn't end with Pharaoh's dreams being interpreted by Joseph. There was work to be done for the "vision" of the storehouses filled with grains to come true. Action had to be taken.

C. Examples from the Bible

We saw that vision as a picture of the future. Now there are examples in the Bible to help us understand this concept better.

1. Paul

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9:15–16 ESV emphasis added)

- a) This is the passage where God tells Ananias to go the street called straight and meet Saul. And in response to Ananias' doubt, the Lord tells Ananias, "*I will show Saul ...*"
- b) Later in Philippians we read that Paul, after all those years, has not lost his passion toward that call.

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.
(Phil. 3:14 KJV)

2. Lord Jesus Christ
 - a) Our Lord while on earth had a “vision” of the future, if you may. We read about this in the context of His suffering in the cross:
Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross. (Heb. 12:2)
 - b) There is something about the image of a future that is enabling.
 - c) Vision both energizes and enables the person.

II. Elements of a Vision

Let’s probe further by looking at the elements of a vision.

A. It is God-directed.

1. We need to be careful in discerning this as true.
2. First, this is not about extrabiblical visions, visitations, or dreams that people have said they have had. That’s a dangerous trend. In fact, most cults have sprung up on the premise of some exclusive “vision.” That is not what is in discussion here.
3. Second, we must be amply clear that God speaks to us now through his Word and that he will never “reveal” anything that is contrary to his Word.
4. Meditating on the Word of God, understanding and waiting on him, is the first element of visioning.

B. It is founded on prayer.

1. Prayer matters. Prayer is what hinges the vision.
2. Notice this verse in Mathew, which asks us to pray to the Lord of the Harvest:
Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. (Matt. 9:38)
3. Lord of the harvest: One must realize it is Jesus who is saying these words. He is asking that we pray to the Father, who is the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into the harvest field. Jesus could have made that possible without having to ask, yet we are told to pray.
4. First missionary journey: In another instance, we read in Acts 13 that the first missionary journey was birthed as a result of prayer.
5. Lord Jesus Christ: In fact, Jesus while on this earth commenced every aspect of his ministry in prayer.
6. Prayer must always remain the important prefix to any work or activity.
7. Prayer is fundamental both in recognizing what God wants us to do, and in acknowledging our total inability to do it without his help.

III. Experience of My Local Church

A. Our experience

1. When we started to meet as a church some years ago, we were renting a church basement. The place was adequate but not convenient. People found it difficult to find us; we couldn't put signs up because of city regulations.
2. Our location became a hindrance for growth.
3. Our prayer was that we could move to a convenient place, at a reasonable cost. As leaders we were already meeting once a week to pray, and now we got the church involved in two ways:
 - a) Committed prayer that God would lead us to another place, and
 - b) To meet to verbalize what it is that we were looking for.
4. As a result of those meetings, we came away with a simple prayer or vision as we called it: "Be a visible church."
5. You may have already gathered from the phrase that is was a play on words.
6. True, we did not want to remain burrowed in the basement, but at the same time we also wanted this new place that God is preparing for us, to be a place where our Lord Jesus Christ would be visible to that community.
7. People were galvanized in prayer, and everyone in the church knew what answered prayer would look like.
8. In about one year God opened up a place for us in the most miraculous way.

B. What were our specific lessons on vision casting?

1. Having verbalized our vision, we were able to thank God specifically for answered prayers.
2. God is the initiator, motivator, and accomplisher of the vision.
3. The vision came from God; it was laid in our hearts; he gave us the opportunity to pray for the vision; and when the vision was accomplished, we were able to glorify his name for answered prayers.

IV. Application

A. Here are a few pointers on visioning:

1. Visioning is merely a picture of the future that God lays in our hearts.
2. As we depend on him in Word and in prayer, we will see him work in our midst by making it a reality.
3. Visioning moves us away from our limitations and firmly places it on God himself.
4. We acknowledge without his help we can do nothing.
5. Visioning helps us to recognize answered prayers.

B. How do I apply this as an elder?

1. Ask yourself these questions:

- a) As an elder do I have an image of what my local church will look in five years?
- b) Can I commit to pray fervently for it to come true?
- c) Can I commit to work as unto the Lord in fulfilling the vision?

If you have answered yes to these questions, I think you have given your consent to working on a vision. Now commit to do this together with the members in your church.

2. Beyond vision

God is good in that He gave us the gift of dreaming and yet His promise offers something beyond our wildest imaginations or ability to envision. We read in Ephesians:

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.” (Eph. 3:20)

For those of us who “expect great things from God; attempt great things for God,” God is saying we can never out-vision him.