

Visionary Leadership

“VISION”—that’s the catch word of the 90’s. It’s a good word. One that Webster defines as “unusual discernment or foresight.” Some people have it, some don’t—it seems. What really makes the difference?

They were your basic plodders—that team of men who would later revolutionize the world as appointed witnesses of Christ (Acts 1:8). The disciples of Jesus were **not** inherently men of vision. They came from the hum drum of life, caught up in daily, dull routines of life like everyone else—without much glimmer of hope beyond their practical existence.

Men and women of vision don’t jump out like hot pop-tarts on hurried mornings. Jesus planted the first flicker of light in his novice followers, saying “*Blessed are your eyes, for they see*” (Matt 13:16). And then He worked pretty hard to fan their flicker into flames!

How can we become a people of vision? This question challenges the church today.

The answer is quite simple: *incubation of godly character breeds godly vision*. A brief look at the Apostle Paul’s farewell to the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20) reveals some of these basic character requirements. Paul had spent three years stoking the young faith that had flared up in their hearts. (Acts 20:31). Now he was giving the fire one last aeration. He would never see them again. No detailed plan was left with them. Rather, Paul’s discourse conveyed the qualities necessary to apprehend a vision from God for themselves.

Every generation, every new guard, must possess it’s own vision from God. But, the greatest heritage to be passed from one generation to the next is the Christ-like character that engenders sacrificial vision for the kingdom.

Godliness makes the difference between a vision of God versus a vision from man. In this magnificent discourse, we see the character necessary for gaining a vision from God.

Godly Vision Requires Humility

“*I served the Lord with great humility ...*” (Acts 20:19). Humility proves to be one of most elusive of all Christian characters. The very effort of ascending to this trait seems to betray arrogance. Yet, Scripture is saturated with teaching on this subject! (For example, Rom 12:3, Phil 2:1-11). For a vision to be godly, we must forgo the need to draw attention to ourselves. “*For it is not the man who commends himself who is approved, but the man whom the Lord commends*” (II Cor 10:18). If it is God’s vision, He Himself will commend us. We are free to direct all credit and attention to Him.

Some helpful measuring sticks are: 1) How frequently do I use the personal pronoun when I talk about “my” vision? 2) How do I react when people disagree with me or oppose me the vision? 3) Do I complain about others who don’t share the vision? A godly vision is not self-affirming, not big numbers or hype. “*For it*

seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as men. We are fools for Christ ... up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world”. (II Cor 4:9-13)

So how do we get humility? One thing is sure, the harder *we* try by human means, the worse it gets! Only God can fashion it in our lives and we need to welcome the tools He uses: trials, oppositions, adversaries, humiliating circumstances. These things either bring out the pride in us (“Why me?”) or develop humility (“Lord, thank you for cutting me down to size.”)

Godly Vision Requires Passion

“... *with tears ...*” (Acts 20:19). Paul modeled the passion of Jesus. Not a sterile, logical choice, Paul’s passion catalyzed his vision. Passion, according to Webster, is “an intense, driving feeling.” There is no vision without passion.

Much spiritual sight seems to be lost for lack of time in our busy lives. No where does scripture say, “If you have time, then help with the vision.” The question is not really one of time, but of priority. We always make time for that which grips us deeply. What our passion is, becomes our priority. What our priority is, we give our time to.

The Lord himself was motivated by passion for mankind. “*For God so loved the world ...*” (John 3:16). The Creator longed for his image-bearing creation to be reconciled to Himself. The Apostle Paul’s heart was on his shirt sleeve when he said, “*I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race.*” (Rom 9:2-3). John Knox is reported to have said, “Lord, give me Scotland, or I die.”

How can we develop this kind of passion? I find myself praying, “O Lord, break the stranglehold of fleshly passions and self-centered desires. Break my heart with the things that break your heart.”

Godly Vision Requires Perseverance

“... *I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews ... I know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.*” (Acts 20:19, 23). This requires “staying power”, the ability to keep on going in the face of roadblocks. Vision doesn’t come easy, for it is rooted in that which is eternal, not temporary.

There is a false notion that when you discover a vision from God, things will just fall into place. Yet, Jesus implied that the gates of Hell will make valiant attempts at breaking down the kingdom of God (Matt 16:8). This means war! Visionary plans at times will be frustrated, discouragement knocks continually at the door. Many things will work against you and the vision God gives. One missionary who worked among an un-reached people was asked why he

continued on when so few people were responding to the Gospel. His answer was simply that “God sent me here and He has not directed me otherwise.”

God has called us to be faithful. He is responsible for the results. “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (II Cor 4:16-18).

Godly Vision Requires Conviction

“... *I have not hesitated* ...” People of conviction are “trigger-happy” people. They are ready at a drop of the puck to work toward for the kingdom’s sake. They really do believe and it is normative for their entire life. They are ready in season and out. Not careless, but sensing the urgency.

I know a believer who has a black belt in karate. One Sunday a friend playfully came up behind and poked him on the sides of his waist. Being taken by surprise, the believe, like lightening, brought his elbows in tight, trapping the prankster’s hands while reflexively snapping his head back in a reverse “head-butt.” Swiftly, he spun around almost “chopping” his surprised friend on the neck! Our convictions are revealed by our spiritual reflexes. There is an urgency in the kingdom of God, and vision is not wasted on the double-minded.

Godly Vision Requires Relevancy and Adaptability

“... *publicly and from house to house.*” (Acts 20:20). Paul was not hung up on the form of his ministry—he was willing to sacrifice personal preferences. “*I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some*” (I Cor 9:22). Sometimes vision is hindered by our “comfort zone” or “used-to zones”. We have all heard someone say, “That is not what we are used to.” To be sure, some forms *are* more comfortable to us than others. But, that is not the issue. Vision can die for lack of innovation, when a person is unwilling to let go of preferences. We should be ready to use whatever means are most effective (assuming these means do not violate clear teaching of scripture).

One church, in wanting to effectively reach young adults, started a “Saturday Night Live” outreach in the church basement, complete with drama, up-beat music, and a gospel presentation. Others have effectively used a home bible study.

Some methods are time test and very effective, others are innovative and can be equally effective. Some use summer camps to attract children to the gospel, others use sports clinics. Like Paul, who adapted his methods to gain a hearing, we too, must be flexible. Whether donning a coat and tie to meet a businessman for lunch or putting on old pair of jeans to go talk to a street kid, we must be willing to adapt to the need of the moment.

Godly Vision Requires the Message of Repentance and Faith

“*I have declared ... that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus*” (Acts 20:21). The primary message of any godly vision must include the Good News of restoration to God. This was front and center in Paul’s ministry, for it is the whole point of the kingdom program. But, this means repentance and faith must be the heart of *our* daily walk with God. We constantly fail as Christian and must therefore be relentlessly turning to God. To do otherwise earns us the title “hypocrite”.

The late, infamous communist leader of China, Mao Tse-Tung, spoke of “continual revolution” as the key to his political philosophy. As members of God’s kingdom, we need to be in continual revolt against the natural bent of our hearts. This is revitalizing in the Christian life. Daily confessing our sins to the Vision-Giver, daily offering our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1), reckoning ourselves to be dead to sin (Rom 6:11).

Why do we need this continuous revolution in our lives? Because our message can become stagnate, old. Our testimonies easily degenerate into historical background, rather than a living, dynamic story that attracts people to the Savior.

These reflections are certainly not *the* definitive list of required characters for a man of vision. But, equally certainly, the man or woman who wants to be gripped by a vision from God must cultivate these Christ-like characteristics. The Apostle Paul left his stamp of character with the young Ephesian elders. If they aspire to the same, God will provide them the vision for His particular work among them. We need men and women, young adults and young people who are becoming a people of godly character. It is to these kind of people that God gives a vision.

by Chuck Gianotti, updated April 2002