

Enhancing Your Vision

Prayer & Partnership

Proverbs 29:18; Philippians 4:4-9

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Bethany Church

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An optimist fell off the top of the Empire State Building. As he plummeted past the 52nd floor, he was heard to say, "So far so good!"

Sometimes our optimism isn't any more realistic. Positive thinking for the sake of positive thinking is delusional. That's why we get into trouble with some of it. Sometimes, we are simply in denial. We don't need to be deluded to be positive. When you partner with a good God, you have terrific reason to be positive, even enthusiastic. Did you know that the word, "enthusiasm" is simply the English pronunciation of Greek words that mean "with God"? In truth, when you see things with God, you become enthusiastic and energized.

Today I want to focus on what you see. I want to address your vision. In your sermon notes, I outlined this message with the letters I-S-D, which in Minnesota means an Independent School District. I believe we need to go to school on this topic because nothing, absolutely nothing, affects your life more than your vision. Consider yourself in school today.

Vision is not only what you see; it is what you believe about what you see. This is crucial. Paul was in prison when he wrote Philippians. He did not see himself as a victim, however. He saw prison. He saw his enemies; but he also saw God. Paul was not about to despair because the one with him was greater than all his enemies and stronger than any jailhouse bars. His vision determined his attitude. Vision determines attitude. Vision also determines actions. Because Paul saw more than prison, he gave thanks, encouraged believers and proclaimed good news. He acted like an ambassador not an inmate. Vision

determined his actions. Vision determines achievement. Paul made an impact while in prison precisely because of his vision. Vision directs your actions and thus what results. No athletes make it to the Olympics without training. Their vision of gold medals and their abilities result in their training and eventually their achievements. Without a gold medal vision there is no gold medal achievement. What you achieve depends upon what you see and what you believe about what you see. Your vision dominates your life!

What's more, both what you see and what you believe about what you see are changeable. On a walk through your backyard, a naturalist, geologist and mineralogist all see different things. They see what they are prepared to see. Similarly, you see only what you are prepared to see. Who prepares you to see things? Who prepares you to see reality? What do you suppose you are missing? No doubt, everyone of us is missing a lot; but could what we be missing be essential to our health, vital to our families, crucial for our community?

Most of us learn to see as apprentices. Someone helps us notice and understand our surroundings. If you hang with mechanics, you pick up on it. You see a whole different thing than the woman, who when her car turned over a hundred thousand miles and the odometer went to zero, pulled her car over to the shoulder of the freeway and shut it off thinking it was broken.

When we hang with God, we see differently. Vision is a product. The Bible teaches that God's vision is an absolute must. We need it. **"Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained,"** observed Solomon. The Hebrew term that we translate vision, "chaazown," appears 35 times in the Old Testament; and in each case, it speaks of a God-given picture. Solomon declared that where there is no God-given picture, no revelation, no prophecy, the people are unrestrained. There is no guiding light or focus for all their activity. Many of their actions become destructive and self-defeating. People need God-given pictures to direct them; and these come in circumstances we face, in dreams and messages. God gives us vision in fellowship with other believers, in Scripture and most clearly in Jesus. A testimony I've heard time and again is that "before Jesus I was directionless."

When Paul wrote the Philippians from prison, he told them five things that would enhance their grasp of reality. He told them five things that would help them develop a sensitivity to see God's vision for them and pursue it.

First, he told them to *celebrate*. **"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"** Paul emphasized that. When we celebrate God's love, we act on truth. When we act on truth, we build convictions. God's vision will be contested in your life. Conviction-building is critical. Celebrating encourages and strengthens you. **"The joy of the Lord is your strength,"** the Bible says. People are energized by celebrations. I've observed my own health change as I moved from sadness to celebration. There is no healthier activity on this planet than giving thanks. Want to extend your life? Give thanks. Want to pull out of depression? Celebrate. Celebrate the truth. Celebrate with

others. In every situation, celebrate and give thanks. ***"In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."***

I was sixteen years old when I got the news that my father had died. He had gotten his car stuck and suffered a massive heart attack while trying to push and dig it out. I shed many tears over the death of my father. I'm not ashamed of that. But after I went home to my mother that day and spent some time with her, I knelt in my bedroom alone and gave thanks. I thanked God that all things work together for the good of those who love God. I thanked God for time with my dad. I thanked God for the good that would unfold in and through his death. I thanked God for receiving my dad in heaven. I celebrated the greatness and goodness of God in my pain. I found that my celebration did not eliminate the hurt; but it prepared me to see God's goodness, and it brought tremendous strength.

Even as we are urged to celebrate, we're instructed on the principle of *honor*. ***"Let your gentleness be evident to all,"*** Paul wrote. ***"Honor one another above yourselves,"*** Paul told the Romans. Gentleness and honor recognizes the truth about others. They are to be respected and valued as beloved children of the holy and almighty God. The actions of gentleness and honor not only reinforce a truthful perspective on your neighbors, it builds community. God's visions are always bigger than we are. We will never accomplish God's vision for our lives unless others help us, unless we are part of a team. Even as no one can be a champion football player without a championship team, you cannot be the champion you were designed to be without the comradery and chemistry of a championship team. Do you believe a championship team is being built here? I'll tell you right now, God has no lesser design for us. Honor those about you. Be gentle and respectful. Honor their thinking. Listen carefully, and carefully respond. You're building a team.

Third, pray. Resist anxiety. Resist fear. Lift every care, every concern to God. Talk with God and blend that talk with thanksgiving. Don't just let your prayers be problem-centered; let them be truth centered. This brings calm. Performance always improves when one is calm inside. This calmness fosters patience and persistence. Both are necessary for any great vision to be embraced and fulfilled.

Fourth, think! Direct your thinking. Direct your thought life. Ponder what is true, noble and right. Dwell on what is pure, lovely and admirable. Think on these things. Stop the stinking thinking that casts yourself as a victim, that seeks vengeance or degrades and manipulates people for your gratification. Stop the thinking that diminishes yourself or dismisses your sins. Stop excusing performance that is less than excellent. Get help; improve! Be in charge of what you think and ponder. Be selective. Don't let the boob tube, the movie theater, the magazine or the newspaper direct you. You are to be in charge. Think about things that are worthy of praise.

Finally, practice! Practice what you've learned and received, heard and seen. It does not good only to hear or see. Doing is essential. Practicing these things brings change. Actions bring achievements.

Celebrate, honor, pray, think, practice. These will not only help you see the picture God is bringing to you in circumstances, dreams, messages, fellowship, Scripture and in Jesus; they will help that picture become reality; for the future belongs to people with vision.