

## VISION

# *FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL LIVING*

*Philippians 4:4-9*

*July 14, 2002*

Wesley J. Gabel

An exhausted, over-worked man crawled into the back seat of his car. Despite the fatigue, he cleaned the windows and wiped everything down. He was so drowsy that he thought he might just rest his heavy eyelids. That was the last thing he could remember until he heard his daughter's voice. She said, *"You can drive the car. My father won't mind."* *"Are you sure?"* asked the boyfriend. *"No problem,"* she responded, *"besides he'll never know."* The boy circled around the front of the car, opened the door, got in, and simultaneously they closed both doors. Soon the car was moving. The boy drove to a secluded spot, parked and turned off the engine. The daughter sighed, *"We're finally alone!"* Two young pair of eyes turn toward one another in an extended gaze. Suddenly, a third pair of eyes joined them. The father broke the silence: *"Now that we're alone, what do we want to do?"*

Do you think the couple would have behaved differently if their vision had included the girl's father? There would have been a radical difference. What you see with your eyes, what you see with your mind, what you see with your heart, is central to what you think, believe and do. Vision is crucial to your goals and vital to your life. Your vision or awareness governs your life, and it is critical to ask *"What do you see?"*. *What do your eyes see? What does your mind see? What does your heart see?"* Does it neglect an important aspect of reality? Does it align with the truth?

One afternoon a young woman, who we'll call Carla, showed up in my office. Carla wasn't a parishioner, but I knew her and her family. Her marriage was difficult and she was attracted to a man at work. She wanted to leave her husband and marry her coworker. She wanted God's approval. She told me that she felt so much love with this man it had to be right. It couldn't be adultery. I told her that God had no "exception clause" like "if you feel so much love with another man, it's not adultery." I told her that God loved both her and her husband and could heal their marriage, and I would be glad to help. She left my office in torment. Within days, she attempted suicide. After recovering, she divorced her husband and married the man. Soon I heard that Carla was battling cancer. I wonder about the effects of nagging guilt on the immune system and her vulnerability to disease. It certainly doesn't help her battle the disease. Sadly, her new husband beat her, and the new marriage dissolved. Carla didn't lack vision. She lacked an accurate vision. She lacked a trustworthy vision that would lead to blessing.

Vision is one of five principles from Philippians 4 that are critical to realizing your potential and fulfilling your purpose in life. Paul actually shares *Five Steps to Successful Living*. Success is a daily thing. It is a journey not a destination. It is not "*Some day I may become a real success!*" Instead, it is "*I am living successfully, doing what I'm suppose to be doing.*"

Celebration is one of those "suppose to's" or steps in Philippians 4. "**Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I say rejoice!**" wrote Paul. Celebration brings the strength necessary to fulfill our purpose and potential. It also helps with our vision. Celebration or "rejoicing in the Lord" helps correct our vision by pointing us to a good and great God who is worthy of trust. Carla needed that corrective. She needed a vision that helped her embrace the love and wisdom of her heavenly father who forbid adultery. Vision is so important.

You can joyfully travel a road, but if you're vision doesn't accurately read what's ahead, you can be in trouble. I recall in my childhood spotting a deer as I my father drove our family car over the crest of a hill. "Deer," I yelled, and immediately my father jammed on the brakes. The deer, who was blinded by our head lights, must have felt the heat of the engine because we slid to a stop within inches of his motionless body. Once fully stopped, my father honked the horn, and the deer finally decided to move. Vision, in this case, the young eyes of a child, helped my father identify danger and take steps to avoid it just in time.

An accurate vision is so important that Jesus emphasized it in his teaching. He called some leaders *blind guides*, and he told his disciples:

***The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*** (Matt 6:22-23, NIV)

When Jesus spoke, he was not talking about physical blindness. He was talking about spiritual blindness. His words, "***If then the light within you is darkness,***" refer not to bad eyes, but to poor awareness, specifically blindness to God's nature and presence. People rejected Christ because they misunderstood God's nature and were oblivious to God's presence in Jesus.

When Paul wrote in Philippians 4:5, "***Let your gentleness be evident to all,***" he supported that command with the words, "***The Lord is near.***" He was addressing their vision. Most scholars believe he was instructing his readers that Christ would return soon, and therefore, they soon would be held accountable. Gentleness results from that vision. If we recognize that we soon will give an account of how we behave, we tend to be vigilant. We put things in order and we keep them in order. Awareness that Christ died for our neighbor, that how we treat the least of our neighbors is how we treat Christ, and that Christ will soon hold us accountable affects our behavior. That vision or awareness

affects our attitude and our action. "The Lord is near" surely would make the reader think of Christ's return. However, Paul did not specifically mention Christ's return. He said, "The Lord is near." That could also alert his readers to the spiritual presence of Christ, much like the father alerted the couple to his presence with the words: "Now that we're alone, what do we want to do?"

One of my favorite stories is about a boy who held a dead rat by the tail and brought it to his mother. He said, "Mama, Mama, look at this rat! I clubbed it, whacked it, bashed it, smashed it, stomped it, dragged it, threw it," and then catching sight of the visiting pastor, he finished, "and the Lord called him home." Vision changed him dramatically. It changes us too.

When your vision recognizes that the Lord Jesus Christ, the judge of all humanity, is near, then your thinking, your talking and your walking will be different. When you realize that the Lord is so near that he is involved in your circumstance, then you are alert to fulfill your purpose at that moment. You will fulfill your purpose not as a zombie acting unknowingly, but just like Jesus who consciously acted in partnership with his heavenly father. However, if Jesus is distant in your eyes, you will act unwisely, not be alert to your purpose and not fulfill the will of God.

In March of 1998 a massive tornado ripped through southwest and south central Minnesota. The river town of St. Peter was badly disfigured, and little Comfrey was nearly leveled. The church I led sent a work team of youth and adults into the area to do some rebuilding. I was nervous because the project was not organized for youth. The work project was not about getting youth involved or developing them. There could be lengthy times when the youth would not know what to do, and boredom could set in. Working conditions could be miserable; and the youth could become disheartened. I was concerned. Would our youth help or hinder the tornado victims. If the youth saw themselves sent by God at that very moment to serve the victims, if their vision focused on meeting needs in any way possible, then whether they did menial tasks or fun tasks, whether they fetched tools, held boards for others, handed out sandwiches, or endured long periods of boredom to just be available, they would be successful. Even if they did little, their availability would bless. However, if they became restless, started feeling sorry for themselves and began to mess around to entertain themselves, their needs not the victims' would be the focus. The issue would be keeping our youth busy and occupied, not helping tornado victims. God sent that team not to be served, but to serve and reveal his love even if it meant just being available for a day. Because the youth grasped that vision, they were of great help... and their help was requested again.

Do you realize that the one who walked on water, healed the sick and cast out demons is not faraway? The one who hung on the cross for your and my sins is near. He will hold everyone accountable. Are you getting to know him so that you see him accurately? Do you see his proximity? Do you realize that he is near you in the circumstance you are facing now?

A harsh spirit or a gentle spirit comes from what you see. Do you see how people have hurt you? Are you angered and embittered? Do you see the Lord who endured that all for you? Do you see the Lord who died to forgive you? Upon what are you focusing? You need an accurate vision. You need a spiritual vision.

Let your gentleness be evident to everyone. The Lord is near!