

How Vital Is Vision?

Proverbs 29:18

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"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Proverbs 29:18

In spiritual terms, "Divine perspective", "wisdom", "insight", "illumination", and "vision" are equal terms. Many passages in the Word of God reveal the importance of such vision. Psalm 119:18 says, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law." Psalm 119:130 says, "The entrance of Thy words giveth light, it giveth understanding unto the simple." James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." In Ephesians 1:15-19 and the context, Paul recorded one of the greatest of his prayers. This is one of the most important prayers one human being can pray for another. It is a prayer for "illumination", the one subjective thing needed for understanding the things of God after the New Birth. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see." For spiritual understanding we must have both regeneration (salvation) and illumination (vision).

The text of this study shows us negatively how important "vision" is. An individual's seeing depends on the "lens" he looks through, just as his hearing depends of the "filter" he listens through. As we begin this study of the Master's Great Mandate to His people, it is necessary that we understand the value of vision. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." This verse is universal and absolute.

I. A SPIRITUAL CONCEPT

Think, first, of the *spiritual concept* that is presented here, the concept of "vision." It is a specialized kind, spiritual vision, the most important kind a person can have.

Everything begins with vision. You will be what you see, but what you do not see, you cannot be. You will become what you behold, but what you do not behold, you cannot become. In other words, what you look at lovingly, longingly, and lastingly, you will become like. You will be like what you look at. What you lastingly look at will determine your life. So, everything depends on how well we see.

Oswald Chambers, the renowned author of *My Utmost For His Highest* and other great devotional works, wrote with great perception when he said, "*It is easier to serve God without a vision, easier to work for God without a call, because then you are not bothered by what God requires; common sense is your guide, veneered over with Christian sentiment.*" But if once you truly hear the full commission of Jesus Christ, the awareness of what God wants will be your goal from that point on, and you will no longer be able to work for Him on the basis of common sense."

Physical vision is a combination of objective stimulus (something real in the surrounding world) and subjective experience (the way the individual *perceives* the objective stimulus). The objective stimulus may never change, but once it registers upon the eyes of the individual, it is subject to distortion, rejection, or reception — in short, it is subject to the interpretation of the person upon whom the stimulus acts.

Perception is the stimulus of everything. This formula will prove true: *Perception* leads to *Process* (or Procedure), and *Process* will lead to *Product*. In the church of Jesus Christ, it is apparent that we suffer at large from a radical crisis of product. We simply are not generally producing the kind of Christians who produced the Book of Acts! Thus, if our product is deficient, our perception must be deficient, also.

What is spiritual vision? The J. B. Phillips paraphrase of Colossians 1:9 defines it for us. Paul wrote, "I pray that you will see things from God's point of view." *Spiritual vision is seeing things from God's point of view.* But the Bible plainly tells us that His viewpoint will not agree with ours (Isaiah 55:10). Thus, a radical spiritual adjustment is necessary to bring our viewpoint into agreement with God's viewpoint.

Dawson Trotman, a man of great spiritual vision, said, "Vision is getting on your heart what God has on His." But what does God have on His heart? Our text answers that question in one word: "people." God has *people* on His heart. How *many* people? *All* people. God has on His heart every person on earth. And He expects His children to come into agreement with His concern. He seriously expects His children to impact the whole wide world. Thus, a *global mission* requires a *global vision*. This means that most Christians need an "Atlas attack" in which they begin to see their responsibility to carry the whole world in order to begin to impact it for Christ.

Ponder the question again: What does God have on His heart? What should be at the heart of the believer's dreams and visions? The text answers: *people*. "Where there is no vision, *people* perish." Why, then, are 4/5 of the world's people only very poorly evangelized and very poorly educated in the substance and strategy of the Gospel, with nearly half of the human race never having redemptively heard the name of Jesus? Would the kind of Christianity revealed in the Book of Acts have tolerated this situation? Certainly not! Then what is the difference between the Christianity of the Book of Acts and the version of Christianity that largely prevails in today's evangelical (particularly American) church? Is the Jesus of today's church a different Jesus from theirs? No. Is the Holy Spirit different? No. Is the Bible different? Yes, but the advantage at this point lies with *us*, *not* with the early Christians. *They* didn't even have a completed New Testament. *We* do, but even with this advantage, we are nowhere near their impact level.

So what is the difference between the Christianity that produced the Book of Acts and *our* kind of Christianity? The only basic difference between "their Christianity" and "ours" is one of *strategy*. Their strategy showed an apparent disregard for building *institutions* and majored almost exclusively on building *individuals*. Their strategy was one of *explosion* (outward) instead of *implosion* (inward). Jesus trained twelve men, "whom He named apostles," (Luke 6:13). Why did He give a different name to them? What profile, what highlight, what insight is intended when His main (you *could* say His *only*) training process was centered in twelve men, and when He turns from the typical word "disciple" to give them the different and special title of "Apostle"? The key is surely in the meaning of the word. It means "to send away from" Here lies the key. He built those specially chosen men to keep them "with Him" (Mark 3:14) *only long enough to train and infect them with His Life, His Vision, and His Strategy*, and then it was His Design to send them as far away from their training base as they *could*, or *would*, or *might* go. His direction was: Temporarily *in*, but Vocationally *out!* And the fact that the list of Gifts (Gifted Men) He gave to His Church begins with "apostles" (Ephesians 4:11) indicates that the apostle was given to the church to turn the members and the ministry of the church *outward*.

Jesus Christ fully expects every saved person to be dominated by a vision that is always turning his eyes and his feet out—to the ends of the earth. He clearly gave us a *global mission*, but (I repeat) a global vision certainly requires a *global vision*. And I also believe that both the vision and the vocation are to be *individual* and not primarily *institutional*. The "inactive" Christian of today's church, uninvolved in the task of world impact, is inconceivable and intolerable in the plan of God. I believe that Jesus fully expects every saved person to have a vision and a *strategy* (a strategy that was first clearly modeled by Him) to impact the world to the ends of the earth and until the end of time!

Remember that God has all people on His heart, and He expects no less of us. Henrietta Mears, the great Christian teacher, said, "When I consider my ministry, I think of the whole wide world. Anything less than that would not be worthy of Christ nor His will for my life." As Christians, our plan has always been one which calls for *Total World Impact*, and its specific strategy is decreed in our Lord's Great Commission. Anything less than this is man-made, and is not big enough to satisfy God.

It is a crucial insight to realize that when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost in the full release of redemptive power, the first stated outcome of His Coming was that "your young men shall see visions and your old men will dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). According to the context, these visions and dreams are not those experienced in sleep, but those experienced by a heart which is filled with the Holy

Spirit. In context, these dreams and visions are *strategy* dreams and visions which will lead toward the more complete fulfilment of our Lord's Great Commission. Such strategy dreams and visions should be the daily stock-in-trade of normal New Testament Christians, not the nebulous, mystical exceptions for a few flighty people.

Sometime ago, several top leaders of the corporation went to the president and asked, 'What has the first vice-president got on you that requires you to retain him? Why do you pay him such a fabulous salary when he is so non-productive?' When the president asked them what they meant, they led him into the first vice-president's office and pointed through the small window which looked into the workroom. The first vice-president was leaning back in a swivel chair which was turned away from his desk. His hands were behind his head and his feet were resting on the window sill. He was unmoving, either asleep or staring out the windows. 'See what we mean? That's all he ever does, and yet he draws a fabulous salary. Why?' The president soberly replied, 'Listen closely to me. Last year, that man in that seat in that office had one idea that netted this corporation over \$85 million . . . This year, he has only one assignment . . . !' "

Where is the man in today's church who is thinking God's 85 million dollar idea? Where is the man who is seeing God's 85 million dollar vision, or dreaming God's 85 million dollar strategy dream? The Creator-God of the Bible never lacks giant creative ideas, but where are His common saints who are seeing from His viewpoint *strategically*, and getting on their hearts *strategically* what God has on His?

Another formula concerning vision:

*No vision = total failure;
Limited vision = little success;
A vision — a plan — action = only a dream;
A vision + a plan — action = a haunting dream (guilt); but
A vision + a plan + action = a spiritually productive ministry.*

Note that the test of a person's vision is in the *action* that is stimulated by the vision. Without action, both you and your gifts will remain in the category of "potential." *Potential is dormant ability that is never mobilized through vision.*

Christian leader Myles Munroe, in a book entitled *Understanding Your Potential*, said this about a believer's potential: "The wealthiest spot on this planet is not the oil fields of Kuwait, Iraq or Saudi Arabia. Neither is it the gold and diamond mines of South Africa, the uranium mines of the Soviet Union or the silver mines of Africa. Though it may surprise you, the richest deposits on our planet lie just a few blocks from your house. They rest in your local cemetery or graveyard. Buried beneath the soil there are dreams that never came to pass, songs that were never sung, books that were never written, paintings that never filled a canvas, ideas that were never shared, visions that never became reality, inventions that were never designed, plans that never went beyond the drawing board of the mind and purposes that were never fulfilled. Our graveyards are filled with massive volumes of potential that remained potential.

"Potential demands that you never settle for what you have accomplished. One of the great enemies of your potential is success. Small successes destroy great possibilities! In order to realize your full potential, you must never be satisfied with your last accomplishment. It is also important that you never let what you *cannot* do interfere with what you *can* do. The greatest tragedy in life is not death, but a life that never realized its full potential.

"To simplify this concept let us look at one of the most powerful elements in nature . . . the seed. If I held a seed in my hand and asked you, 'What do I have in my hand?' what would you say? Perhaps you would answer what seems to be the obvious . . . a seed. However, if you understand the nature of a seed, your answer would be *fact* but not *truth*. The truth is that I hold a forest in my hand. You see, in every seed there is a tree, and in every tree there are fruits or flowers with seeds in them. And these seeds also have trees that have fruit that have seeds . . . that have trees that have fruit that have seeds, etc., etc. What you see is not all there is. So the margin of difference between one seed and a food

supply of wheat which could feed the whole world is called 'potential.' 'Potential' is the margin of difference between what you see and what could be.

Could it be that the greatest sin of Christians lies in their unrealized potential? And the greatest unrealized potential today lies in the area of the fulfillment of the Great Commission of our Lord. He has assigned to you a specific role in Total World Impact, and it is a far greater role than you have yet played. This role will never be played without a vision of its possibility. So ***the most important thing in your life is to have and pursue a vision that agrees with God.*** Because your assignment is global, your vision must also be global. Do you have such a vision?

How do weak people like you and me gain God's vision? Here is a workable formula: *proper information plus spiritual illumination* will produce *vision*, which in turn will produce *motivation*, and this motivation will lead to *spiritually productive action*. Note that vision begins with proper information. Just as physical vision begins with the presentation of an external stimulus, so spiritual vision begins with the truth of God in Scripture and all that Scripture relates to. The "building blocks" for such vision are: a working knowledge of Scripture and a sensitive heart to hear it and obey it, an awareness of world geography and national and ethnic cultures of the world, a spiritual appraisal of current events, prayer, informative reading, firsthand experience (the "come and see" of Scripture) of some of the world's mission fields, fellowship with visionary believers, sacrificial giving to missionary causes, meeting productive missionaries and world-impacting Christians, and lifestyle choices. You can begin to cooperate with God in building spiritual vision into your life today. But it is tragically obvious that most Christians your fellowship with regularly do not have such a vision.

II. THE SAD CONDITION

Think, secondly, of the *sad condition* that is specified here. "Where there is no vision." The word "where" might be paraphrased "wherever," so this is a universal statement. What does "no vision" mean in Biblical terms? It means that there is no awareness of God and His Perfect Plan. It means that Satan, "the god of this world," has "blinded the minds of men" to the only things that really and ultimately count! They cannot see or understand these things without regeneration and/or illumination (see I Corinthians 2:9-14). Thus, there is no continuous traffic between heaven and the hearts of men. There is no commerce with that which is invisible, eternal, spiritual—and real. There is no listening to God and looking to Him. In short, "no vision" means that men do not see "the High and Holy One, Who inhabits Eternity," so we are limited to our little horizons and our selfish, petty, sinful plans. Such a limited person with such limited plans will finally implode into himself altogether. You see, everything begins with true vision. Please note the word "true". I use it in contrast to no vision, false vision, and limited vision.

We must sadly admit that most saved people are nearly as introverted, self-centered and survival-dominated as are lost people. Why? Our text again provides the reason: No vision. We seldom see things "from God's point of view." We seldom have on our hearts what God has on His—a whole world of individual lost people.

Each person has a center of perspective that allows them to see everything one way - here is an example:

Dr. Harold Lindsell, the editor emeritus of Christianity Today news magazine, attended a Japanese eye clinic many years ago. While in class one day, the lecturer suddenly raised a chart before the class. He asked, "How many of you see the number eight?" Lindsell was the only one in the class who raised his hand at this point. He later said that he thought it was a conspiracy, that the entire class had intended to play a trick on him. But then, the lecturer asked, "How many of you see the number fourteen?" Every other person in the class raised a hand! The teacher spoke to Mr. Lindsell, "Sir, has anyone ever pointed out to you how seriously color-blind you are?" You see, there was no deceit

involved. Every person in the class that day was telling the truth—as he saw it. One man actually saw the number eight while all the others saw the number fourteen. This is a classic example of a paradigm.

The center of this perspective blots out from vision everything that is not accommodated, and causes the vision to be totally dominated by that which is accommodated. So one's paradigms are all-important.

A lady approached Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, a great Bible teacher of the past, and said to him, "Dr. Morgan, do you really believe that God is interested in the little things in our lives?" Dr. Morgan replied gently, "Madam, you surely don't believe that anything in your life is big to God, do you?"

This is what a center of perspective does. It dismisses certain data as irrelevant, and elevates other data to the position of "truth." However, a paradigm may be so totally subjective (self-determined) that it has no basis in objective reality at all. Indeed, the paradigm may not even allow objective reality.

*Let me give a Biblical example: *The thirteenth chapter of the book of Numbers records the story of the nation of Israel at Kadesh-Barnea, just south of the land God had promised them. They were apparently ready to enter the land. However, they balked in unbelief and sent a team of twelve spies into the land to spy out its vulnerability. The spies came back with a divided report. All agreed that the land was occupied by residents who likely had no thought of giving it up. Ten of the spies, an overwhelming majority, recommended against possession of the land on the basis that the present inhabitants of the land "are stronger than we," and that the children of Israel looked like grasshoppers compared to giants when standing beside them. Two of the spies gave a "minority" recommendation. Admitting the same realities, they nonetheless said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it" (Numbers 13:30). You see, the minority group factored God into their conclusion while the majority did not. So two paradigms determined the different recommendations: one included God, the other did not. **All saw the "giants"; most saw themselves as "grasshoppers"; only two truly saw God. Rather, the majority saw God through the giants, and thus the giants looked bigger than God. The minority saw the giants through God, and thus God was bigger than the giants.** So their perception determined their proposal and their performance. Herein lies the difference between "vision" and "no vision"!*

Human intelligence will always give you your point of view. Only a miracle of illumination will give you God's point of view. Therein lies the difference between "no vision," without which "the people perish," and "vision," by means of which the people flourish.

Imagine no spiritual vision in the *pulpit* of the church you attend. Imagination is not required if you visit many churches! I Samuel 3:1 says, "The Word of God was precious (scarce) in those days, and there was no open (frequent) vision." A reading of the national history that ensued from this point will reveal that tragic things resulted from such a loss of vision.

What if there were no Gospel preached in the pulpit of your church? No awareness of man being lost without Christ? No trust in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit? No unfolding of the deep, rich, eternal counsels of God? No exposure of the infinite riches hidden in the Word of God? No equipping of the listeners to "live in heaven and on earth at once"? No teaching of the work of the Spirit-filled, Word-adapted, prayer-oriented, disciple-building Christian life? Imagine a pulpit with "no vision".

*Some years ago, a great Southern Baptist pastor was praying prostrate on the floor of his study one morning, asking God for an anointing of the Holy Spirit's power upon his ministry. Over and over, he passionately pleaded with God, "Lord, give me Your power. Do not let me preach and minister without Your power." Every serious preacher has prayed this prayer with earnest appeal. However, he declared that suddenly it seemed that the roof over him opened and a hand came down and touched his shoulder and it seemed that God's voice spoke within him, saying, "My son, stop praying!" When he became quiet, the Voice seemed to clearly say, "My son, **with plans no bigger than yours, you don't need My power!**"*

Is your vision God-big—for His glory? Where are the plans, the dreams, the visions, the strategies for total world impact that truly tax the miracle resources of God? Where is the strategy that requires ongoing miracles for its sustenance? Where is the vision that is so big that human resources (whatever the kind or amount) cannot possibly sponsor it? The only eternity-sized vision any of us will ever need is in the Great Commission given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. If your pulpit is not obsessed with the terms "make disciples" and "all nations," how can God possibly be expected to put Heaven's approval upon it? Without this magnificent obsession, the pulpit of your church is marked by "no vision."

Then, it is only a short step to a *pew*, a people, with no spiritual vision of these things. A rule of inner church life is, "like pastor, like people". The people will gradually take on the spiritual profile of their pastor. Suppose, in this succession, that the people in the pew did not have, or lost, their vision of the supernal glory of the Gospel? And of the absolute magnificence of Jesus Christ? And of the greatness and glory of our worldwide task? And of the possibility of impacting the whole wide world with Jesus Christ and His Gospel as the early Christians did? Someone truly said, "The steps from risktaker to caretaker to undertaker are very short steps."

Why do church members get much more excited about a thousand other things than about God, spiritual things, heaven, hell, and eternity? The answer? No vision, thus no motivation, because motivation arises out of vision.

Careful study of the Gospels and the Book of Acts will disclose that the typical Christian Church is run far more on the basis of tradition than on the basis of illumination. Someone wryly said, "Churches had better do and say everything right the first time, because they are going to do it the same way from now on."

When the loss of vision occurs in pulpit and pew, we may be sure that there will be no spiritual vision in *public life*. What if Christians totally lost the vision of their role as salt and light (Matthew 5:14-16) in a decaying and dark world? What if we lost our vision of ourselves as "bodily substitutes", or representatives, of Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:20), "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom we shine as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life" (Philippians 2:14-16)? What if we lost our vision of our high status as "ambassadors for Christ", commissioned to mediate our King's cause in this dark and alien world? But we don't have to guess about it. The absence of vision is clearly observable in pulpit, pew, and public life—merely by examining the occurrence of the consequences declared in this text.

III. THE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES

Think of the *serious consequences* that follow the sad condition of "no vision". "Where there is no vision, the people perish." It has several different meanings. It means "to cast off restraint, to loosen, to dissolve, to break up, to go to pieces, to go naked, to perish." So look at the tragic consequences of a loss of vision among Christians.

First, when there is no vision, the people of the society, of the community, of the church, of the home, "*cast off restraint*". This is the *moral* effect of a loss of vision. A loss of vision produces moral anarchy, in which "every man does what is right in his own eyes." Incidentally, note that when there is no awareness of ultimate reality, men do what is "right in their own eyes", not necessarily what is apparently wrong to them. Remember, too, that "right" and "wrong" are always relative terms to those with merely natural or carnal minds. "Right" and "wrong" are absolutes only to those with a truly spiritual mind. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end of it is death" (Proverbs 14:12). Note that the man is certain that his way is *right*; he never dreams that his way is Satanic and destructive. Again, the difference is in the revelation, the vision, the perception of the individual. It is absolutely amazing to observe how people who are totally blind to spiritual reality give total credibility to their own understanding!

That men everywhere today have cast off restraint is agreed by everyone. Autonomy, anarchy, and self-determination are increasingly wide-spread. The difference between the Son of God and sinners is evident at this point. Jesus said, "I do always the things which please my Father" (John 8:29), but the motto of sinners (indeed, the essence of sin) is, "I do always those things which please me." Some future sculptor may picture twentieth century man with his arms wrapped about himself in loving embrace, kissing his own image in a mirror. However, lest the tragic seriousness of such a situation be absorbed in mild humor, let the words that John Milton placed in the lips of Satan in *Paradise Lost* correct us. Satan showed the inevitable acknowledgment of sinners who pursue their selfishness without restraint when he said, "Myself am hell." Because the ideas of men disagree so radically when each is a law unto himself, world tensions continue to mount. Where there is no frequent vision among men, no clear word from the living God, no vital Christianity, then the people cast off restraint.

Second, this strong Hebrew verb also means "*to disintegrate*." "Where there is no vision, the people *disintegrate*." This is the *social* effect of a loss of vision. Sin, which increases proportionately in a society with the loss of spiritual vision, has a centrifugal force about it, driving men outward from the True Center of Life, God Himself, and thus driving them from each other. So we have a fragmented, divided world. Society begins to "loosen, dissolve, break up, go to pieces." The word "split" is used to describe many situations in our world. We have split atoms, split families, split nations, a split world, and split personalities. A psychiatrist pulled into a service station one day driving a pickup truck. In the back of the truck were three chairs. When asked where he was going, he replied, "I'm going to visit a schizophrenic!" How often individuals are "going to pieces". A college girl said to her room-mate, "I feel like a walking Civil War." Her roommate replied, "That's nothing, I'm a walking *World War*!" An individual can weather almost any problem if he is inwardly united, but he is vulnerable to any attack if he is in controversy with himself.

The story of Judas in the New Testament concludes with these words: "Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18). As you know, Judas hanged himself, and this physical collapse resulted either from his ineptness in trying to hang himself, or as a result of the bloating and decay that resulted from his dead body hanging on the rope for some time. The Amplified Bible says, "He burst open in the middle of his body." As gruesome as this sounds, it gives us a perfect illustration. One translation says that Judas "disintegrated". He literally "came apart". But this was only a final, physical symptom of what had gradually happened for at least three years previous. He had displaced the only possible center, the Divine "cement", which would have integrated his personality and made it a unified whole. He really "went to pieces in the middle." And Judas could well be the "patron saint" of this age. The Bible tells us (Colossians 1:17) that in Jesus Christ alone do "all things hold together," but when men lose "the Beatific Vision of Jesus Christ", society has no cementing influence, no cohesive force, no integrating center. Individuals and institutions disintegrate when Christ is not in control. This is the social result of a loss of spiritual vision.

Third, this Hebrew word also means "*to be unclothed*," or "*to go naked*." Presumably, since every other use of the word is spiritual in nature, this meaning is also spiritual. What a rich field of Biblical study is opened to us if we see this meaning as applying to the spiritual condition of human beings. The translation, "the people are unclothed," reveals the *personal* effect of no vision. Consistently throughout the Bible, the saving of sinners, their "justification," is seen in terms of their being "clothed" with the protecting and qualifying righteousness of Christ, and their condemnation and judgment are seen in terms of their being unclothed and exposed to judgment. In fact, throughout the Bible, clothing is a picture of both sin and righteousness. Dirty clothes are often used as a picture of sin and self-righteousness, and clothes clean and white are used as a picture of the covering, qualifying righteousness of Christ. If you wish to pursue this idea further on the pages of Scripture, these passages will prove to be a rich and rewarding field of study: Genesis 3:7, 21; Zechariah 3:1-5; Matthew 22:11-13; Luke 15:22; Romans 13:11-14; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:5-14; and Revelation 19:7-8.

It is that second work, the work of stripping and reclothing the sinner that is in mind when our text says, "Where there is no vision, the people are unclothed." John 3:36 says, "He who believes on the Son has everlasting life, but he who believes not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." The believer who is trusting Christ is covered by the righteousness of Christ and escapes the wrath of God against sin, but the unbelieving sinner is unclothed, and thus fully exposed to every force that will destroy him.

"Where there is no vision," more and more people remain "unclothed," or unprotected for time and eternity. This is the personal consequence of no vision.

Finally, the Hebrew word is accurately translated in the King James Version. It means to "*perish*". "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Compassion is surely called for here, simply because the commodity in danger is "people". If it were animals or plants, it would not be nearly so serious. But it is people, individuals like you and me. They "*perish*". In John 3:16, the word "*perish*" is placed in antithesis to having "*everlasting life*". To perish means to be involved forever in a living death and a dying life—in a place called hell. Meanwhile, I Corinthians 1:18 indicates that people without Christ are in a *present* state of perishing. This perishing of people is the *spiritual* and *eternal* effect of a loss of vision by Christians. Three people every second perish without Christ—and the Church has largely lost it's vision! Hell fills, and Heaven has vacancies yet to be filled! All because the Church's vision has faded!

Years ago, a wealthy business man went to India on a Bengal tiger hunt. He was in India for six weeks. Upon his return home, he went to the mid-week service of the large church he attended. The church was discussing its annual budget. The businessman shocked the entire church by proposing that all foreign missions giving be omitted from the budget. An elderly gentleman asked the reason for this strange proposal. The reply was, "I have just returned from a six-week trip to India, and during that time, I did not see a single missionary." The older gentleman asked, "And what was the purpose of your trip to India?" The reply was, "I went there on a Bengal tiger hunting trip." "And how many Bengal tigers did you see?" "I saw six of them." The older man said, "That's very peculiar. I spent thirty years in India as a missionary, and I saw hundreds and hundreds of missionaries. But I have yet to see my first Bengal tiger in India!" So very, very much depends on our perspective and our vision.

The words of Proverbs 29:18 were written by King Solomon, a man in whose reign the vision faded. And there was no more disastrous failure in the history of Israel than that of Solomon. The people went to pieces! The nation collapsed! The Kingdom was divided!

The alternative before us is clear: it is either "*vision or division*"! This is true universally, nationally, locally, but especially is it true in the Church of Jesus Christ and in the individual Christian life!

We must, we *must*, wait upon God in quietness and prayer, armed with a deep sense of need and a teachable heart, and ask Him to restore the vision—of His overwhelming Personal Glory, and of His overpowering Plan for us and the world! As the vision is restored, we will rediscover that His entire Plan is revealed in our Lord's Great Commission, and that the mandate there is to "turn people into disciples."

Dawson Trotman was right when he said, "Spiritual vision is getting on your heart what is on God's heart—the world!" Paul prayed that the Colossian Christians might "see things from God's point of view" (Colossians 1:9, Phillips). What a revolution would occur if we did!

An Addendum for the Vocabulary Session
(May offer additional help in teaching the Vocabulary Session)

Additional definitions of a “Disciple”; all of them add useful insights:

A disciple is “*a person in training.*”

A disciple is a *pupil, a student – in short, a learner; so the matter of being a disciple (and of building disciples) involves a steady, developing and purposeful use of the mind.*

A disciple is an *apprentice*, or an *intern* (check the definitions of these words). Compare Jesus as pictured in Isaiah 50:4-8 (see the NASV here!).

A disciple is an *understudy*, a person who voluntarily places himself *under* (often spoken of as being “at the feet of”) another, binding himself to him to learn from him and to pursue his goals. Both parts of this compound word, “under” and “study” are crucial parts of The Process of being a disciple and of enlisting others to be built as disciples. The Process of *becoming-to-be* and of *being-to-build* (the discipline of *being* a disciple), and of *being-to-build* (the discipline of becoming a *discipler*), and of *building-to-be* (the discipline of *building* disciples), and the ongoing goal of being-to-build for you and your disciples, will always involve the submission discipline of being “under” the assignments, accountability, etc., of a discipler, and of continuing endlessly to “study” all the dimensions of the Christian life.

Gerhard Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the New Testament contains this important sentence in definition of the word “disciple”: “The word ‘disciple’ (mathetes) always implies the existence of a *personal attachment* which *shapes the entire life of the one so described.*” (the emphasis is mine, not the author’s).

So a disciple is *a person who is learning to live the life his teacher lives* (remember Luke i6:40b). In fact, in the Epistles, a disciple is often called an “*imitator.*”

Somewhere I saw this wise sentence: “To a disciple, *every day is a classroom, every experience is a lesson, and every person is a teacher.*”

Additional ideas under the words “Discipler” and “Discipling”

From the New Testament standpoint, a disciple is a *teacher-in-training*. Hebrews 5:11 says plainly to the lazy, immature believer who has cooperated in his own immaturity, “For the time (that is, considering the length of time you have been saved), you ought to be teachers.” Note the expectation that every maturing Christian should be a teacher. Illustration: a growing Christian approached a veteran Christian teacher and said, “I want to learn; would you teach me?” The wise veteran teacher replied, “If you really want to learn, *teach!*” A wise disciple will shift his self-concept from that of a mere *learner* to that of a *teacher*, because being a true teacher necessitates also the discipline of being a true learner. Every wise disciple will take an inside-out approach, and learn (read, observe, study, etc.) with the purpose in mind of sharing or discussing what you learn with someone else within 48 hours after you learn it (and that is only the beginning of a lifetime of teaching the concept which is learned). Just think of what would happen for the advance of the Cause of Christ and in building disciples if every “auditor” in church or in classes where the Bible is taught would teach the truths learned to someone else within 48 hours. What a difference it would make just in the *hearing, listening, learning, note-taking, and learning* of that auditor!

Disciple-making (discipling) is the *intermediate objective* that links the *immediate assignment* (being a disciple; living the vocational Christian life in all its activities, accountability and vitality) with the *ultimate goal* (fulfillment of the Great Commission through and army of disciple-makers).

The verb for “discipling” is used in Matthew 13:52, which deserves a lifetime of study, and Acts 14:21, which is part of an incredible New Testament model for *missions, evangelism, disciple-making, and world impact* (see Acts 14:19-22).

Discipling is simply *close friendship between two committed Christians* (or, it is fellowship in Christ) which is *motivated by God’s vision to impact the world in His way*. In almost all cases, one of the two Christians leads in teaching, providing insights, instilling strategy, deploying the other in on-the-job training, etc. Someone described it as “unselfish sponsorship of another person in order to accomplish God’s ultimate purposes.”

Additional insights on “**Disciplines.**”

“Discipline” is the accountable action of applying oneself to being and building disciples. “Disciplines” are the areas or categories in which this application must be steadfastly made.

“Disciplines” are the areas of life that reveal the cost of being a disciple and of building disciples. The cost is a large part of the appeal in The Process.

Illustration: A loose wire gives out no musical notes, but fasten the ends of the wire, and the piano, the harp, or the violin may be born.

Definition of discipline: Discipline means the *enduring of short-term pain*, when necessary, for the *enjoying of long-term gain*.

Tom Landry, the late great (Christian) coach of the Dallas Cowboys, said, “It is my task as a coach to *renew the minds of my players* and to get them to *do things they do not want to do* in order to *accomplish the things they do want to accomplish*.” Note the *tension* between the things they don’t want to do and the things they do want to accomplish. It is the coach’s task to make that tension both *creative* and *constructive*. The disciple’s part? To become *mature enough* that “the things you don’t want to do” become *desirable* because of “the things you want to accomplish.”

Illustration: “You can’t borrow a violin today and play in Carnegie Hall tomorrow.” A visitor to New York approached a man on a New York street and asked, “How do I get to Carnegie Hall?” The resident wryly answered, “*Practice, man, practice!*”

Additional ideas on “**Multiplication.**”

The purpose of disciple-making is to mobilize the individual believer to future-generation multiplication and total world impact.

The early followers of Christ were discipled in order to disciple others, teaching them in turn to do the same, until through the process of multiplication, their influence reached the uttermost parts of the earth.

Multiplication is third-generation leadership training by building complete vision into your present disciple. So the building of a disciple must include the vision of multi-generational multiplication.

“A leader who *wins people, adds*; a leader who *develops other leaders, multiplies*.”

Illustration: On the day Noah's ark landed on Mount Ararat at the end of the terrible flood, the animals were happily laughing and singing as they left the ark. However, two snakes were crying as they slithered down the gangplank to leave the ark. "What's with you?" Noah asked. "This is the happiest day in world history, and you are crying. Why are you crying?" One snake answered sadly, "Because you told us to multiply – and we're *adders!*" How sad it will be at the judgment seat of Christ to be reminded that God intended every one of His children to be a spiritual multiplier, the beginning point for many generations of disciples, but instead, we reduced ourselves (*at best*) to adders or mere duplicators (soul-winners, at best).