

Visionary Faith

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The contents of this study are in accordance with the Statements of Faith of the National Association of Evangelicals (USA); Great Commission Churches; and the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

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Chapter 1

The Recognition of *Visionary Faith*

Pursuing human plans to obey God's commands

Table of Topics

- A) Defining *Visionary Faith*
- B) Distinguishing *Visionary Faith*
- C) Recognizing *Visionary Faith*

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- *Visionary faith* is the faith that enables us to pursue human plans in order to obey God's commands.
- Unlike other biblical faith, *visionary faith* does not have certain and specific biblical commands to base it on. Its object is how we *decide* to specifically carry out biblical commands like the Great Commission.
- There is a certain "risk" to *visionary faith* in that there is no divine promise that the method, strategy, or plan you pursue will "work."
- 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 is a classic biblical description of *visionary faith*. The Apostle is praying that God would bless and fulfill the good desires and works of faith that the church would pursue, in order to glorify God.
- The ministries and special abilities of Evangelist, Pastor, and Teacher both require and provide a *visionary faith* that is beyond what God expects of most Christians.
- It is important for all Christians to recognize that God gives different kinds of abilities and levels of *visionary faith* to His people so we are not incorrectly judging one another.

A) Defining *Visionary Faith*

On October 2, 1792 twelve Pastors gathered in a living room in Kettering England to form the Baptist Missionary Society. They all pastored small churches, two of them less than 25 people. At that first meeting an offering of less than \$25 was given to start the Society. Six months later, William Carey, the “founder of modern missions,” boarded a ship sailing for India. He was 32 years old, had been a shoe maker most of his life, and had been rejected for ordination as a Pastor eight years earlier. His wife and four children (one a new born and all under nine years) went with him.

After eight years of grueling labor and conditions, what did the “founder of modern missions” have to show for his faith? One dead son from a virus, a wife who went mentally insane and never recovered, and one baptized convert. Only one. In eight years of evangelism. What empowered William Carey to make all that sacrifice for so little fruit? *Visionary faith.*

Carey’s most famous words were: “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.” This is *visionary faith*. Expecting a lot from God and attempting a lot for God in the pursuit of obeying His commands. Carey believed such faith was necessary in order to fulfill the commandment and commission of Christ to “*Go and make followers of Me in all the nations*” (Matt 28:19). And William Carey was a great example of *visionary faith*.

This is a faith that *tries things* without having any revelation or assurances from God that it will succeed. It is a faith we choose and exercise in order to see the purposes of God fulfilled in our lives and world. *Visionary faith* is the faith that enables us to pursue human plans in order to obey God’s commands.

The Apostle Paul described this kind of faith when he wrote:

Because of the return of Christ, we always pray that God will think you have lived up to His commanding invitation to experience your special privilege and responsibility as a Christian.

We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every work prompted by your faith.

Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of you, and you will be honored along with Him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 1:11-12) ¹

The Apostle was praying that God would bless and fulfill the good desires, works of faith, and human plans that the Thessalonians pursued to fulfill God’s commands and glorify Him. Paul implied that Christians are to be *trying things* in order to please God, even though there is no guarantee that our desires will bear observable fruit or glorify God on Earth. Which is precisely why Paul believed there was a need to pray for God’s “*power*” to enable the fulfillment of those desires, works, and plans.

Properly interpreting, firmly believing, and sacrificially applying Paul's statement will change your life. Join us in a journey through this passage in the following chapters of *Visionary Faith*.

B) Distinguishing Visionary Faith

Visionary faith fits the definition of a *biblical faith* which is “an absolutely certain commitment of reason to a correct understanding of a divine revelation, based on divine evidence, producing divine pleasure.”² However, *visionary faith* is to be distinguished from other aspects of faith in Scripture. As we have written elsewhere, *miracle faith* is absolutely certain with no doubt because it depends on a direct revelation from God that a miracle will be performed or experienced. But *visionary faith* does not have such certainty because its actions are not based on a direct revelation from God.

Likewise, what we have called *empowering faith* is based upon the written revelation of God in Scripture. Therefore, we know God is commanding it. However, obeying God's commands in our specific circumstances requires many steps of faith for which we have no Scripture for. Like all *biblical faith*, we have a written revelation of the general parameters for all the decisions we make, but the specifics are not usually revealed.

For example, consider Christ's command of the Great Commission:

All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make followers of Me in all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And be certain of this: I will always be with you until the end of the age.
(Matt 28:18-20)

There are doctrines, commands, and promises here that our *empowering faith* can be absolutely certain about. We can be certain about the doctrine that “*all authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to*” our King. We can be certain that the King commanded us to “*go and make followers of Me in all the nations.*” And we can be certain of His promise that, “*I will always be with you until the end of the age.*” We can also be certain that at a primary level, God's *strategy* for accomplishing the Great Commission is the local church (cf. Matt 16:18; 1 Tim 3:15).

But beyond these instructions, you often have no more specific divine revelation. Specifically, where, when, how, and with whom are you to plant churches? And can you be certain that converts and churches will be produced? God does not normally tell us these things in advance.

Therefore, in many areas of fulfilling God's general commands, we need to do research, get counsel, make a decision, commit resources, and

exercise *visionary faith* to pursue *human plans to fulfill God's commands*, without a divine revelation of specifically how to do so.

Could we choose wrong in these attempts to carry out God's revealed commands and desires for our life? Yes. This is because we do not have any *divine revelation* telling us the answers to these questions. We have a lot of Christian books filled with opinions, wisdom, and *human research* on these topics, but not *divine revelation*.

Therefore, there is a certain "risk" in *visionary faith*. The location, methods, and people you choose to plant a church may fail. *Visionary faith* does not guarantee "success" because God has not given us a revelation or promise that our strategy or choice will have a particular result. We can make mistakes, even in the process of exercising *visionary faith* to fulfill a biblical command of God. Nevertheless, *visionary faith* is the faith that enables you to pursue human plans in order to obey God's commands.

C) Recognizing Visionary Faith

In some way, all Christians need a certain level of *visionary faith*. God tells us to provide for our families (1 Tim 5:8), but does not tell us how. We need faith to plan and act to pursue work. God tells us to raise godly children (Eph 6:4). But not the specific plans and actions we will need in order to do this. And those things will require faith.

While *visionary faith* is for all Christians, this book is specifically for leaders in the church and the first book in a series called *Pastor Essentials*. By church leaders we are referring to those with the "equipping gifts" of evangelism, pastoring/leading, and teaching. The Apostle writes:

Christ gave the church . . . Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers to repair and prepare God's people for the work of ministry so that the church will be built up. (Eph 4:11-12) ³

These ministries both require and provide a *visionary faith* that is beyond what God expects of most Christians. "*Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers*" are needing to exercise faith in human plans to pursue God's commands more than your average mom, dad, or student.

It is important for all Christians to recognize that God gives different kinds of abilities and levels of *visionary faith* to His people. The Apostle writes: "*Reasonably evaluate yourself based on the special spiritual ability and faith God has given you*" (Rom 12:3). ⁴ Some Pastors or Missionaries can become critical of other Christians who do not serve God with the same amount of commitment and sacrifice. But they must remember, as Paul himself stated, "*By the special power of God I am what I am*" (1 Cor 15:10).

Therefore, be careful not to misjudge, compare, or even disdain the calling that God may give us or someone else. There was a Pastor who

served faithfully in ministry for many years and had an energetic, out-going wife serving beside him. Until she was stricken with dementia. Now his ministry for the past many years has been faithfully and constantly caring for virtually every need day and night, of a woman who is only a shell of who she was. In God's sight, *that* is a high calling.

At this point it may be helpful to define the “equipping gifts” of Evangelist, Pastor, and Teacher. An Evangelist is a person who is especially burdened for reaching unbelievers with the Gospel to save them. They are not as concerned about the needs of believers, and their focus is on the needs of unbelievers.

A Teacher is especially burdened with the needs for spiritual growth in believers. Their focus is on transforming the lives of God's people through the word of God.

Those gifted in pastoring have more diverse ministries. Some Pastors are more task oriented leaders, setting and pursuing the vision and goals of the local church. Other Pastors are more people-oriented, counseling and caring for the needs of the people in the church.

All of these gifted people love people, but in different ways. Sometimes one person will have multiple gifts, for example, both evangelism and leadership. But you will rarely find all of these needed ministries in one person. Which is why a leadership team of variously gifted people is best.

It is particularly people with these “equipping gifts” will have a special faith from God to pursue human plans to fulfill God's commands. They are men and women like William Carey. Christians who plant and Pastor churches. And this book, *Visionary Faith*, is especially dedicated to them.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father, we thank you for the Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers You have given to the church to expand and edify it. We pray for the ones ministering to us today.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) How do we define *visionary faith*?
- 2) How does *visionary faith* differ from other kinds of faith in the Bible?
- 3) What are the “risks” involved in *visionary faith*?

- 4) What do we believe is the basic message of 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12? Do you agree or disagree?
- 5) Why is it important to recognize the different abilities and levels of faith God gives to serve Him? Have you ever been tempted to make a mistake in this way?

Publications & Particulars

¹ “Because of the return of Christ” refers to the context of vs. 7-10 and the connecting *eis* “for which” that begins v. 11.

“*God will think you have lived up to*” trans. *axiōsē*, lit. “consider worthy” (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature (BAGD), F. W. Danker, ed., 3rd ed., 2001). Some trans. reflect the idea of “make worthy” instead of “consider worthy.” (NIV, ESV, NLT). This suggests it is *God’s* responsibility to make us worthy of our call. First of all, the meaning of the word is not “make,” BAGD listing 1) “to consider suitable for requital or for receipt of something; 2) to make an evaluation concerning the suitability of something, esp. an activity.” Thus the NASB is correct: “*To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling.*” Charles Wanamaker comments:

A number of scholars have asserted that this word means “to *make* worthy,” in spite of the fact that with the possible exception of the Epistle of Diognetus 9:1 no other examples of this sense are known. On account of this we should stay with the normal denotation of the word “to *consider* worthy.” This interpretation is substantiated by v. 5, where the compound form *kataxiōthēnai* has this meaning. (*Thessalonians*, 1990)

Also, placing the responsibility on *God* to make us live up to our calling subverts Paul’s entire purpose for what he is both praying and writing. This is a call to the Thessalonians to take responsibility for being counted as worthy of their calling, not a promise that God will do so.

“*His commanding invitation to experience a special privilege and responsibility*” trans. *klēseōs*, lit. “calling.” This word is obscure in English. BAGD defines: “an invitation to experience a special privilege and responsibility.” But it is more than a mere invitation. The *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT) says, “It is used of a commanding call. Paul understands calling as the process by which God calls those, whom he has already elected for salvation and appointed for service so that he may justify them and bring them into his service.” (1986). Accordingly, the position and privileges that God has given us as His children result in an invitation and responsibility to live up to them.

“*Passionate resolve*” trans. *eudokian*, In general it means a strong desire, will, or pleasure (BAGD). However, the NIDNTT notes that decision making is included as well. This is especially true of its verb form *eudokeō*, which is translated “*thought it best*” (NASB, NIV) or “*decided*” (NLT) when referring to a decision by Paul and his companions to stay in Athens (1 Thess 3:1). *Eudokian* is a strong desire that has been decided upon. Thus the RSV, NRSV, and ESV translate it “*resolve*” in 1 Thess 1:11, which Webster’s defines as: “to reach a firm decision about.” But *eudokian* is not just a decision, but a decision on a desire, thus our translation “*passionate resolve*.”

Our translation implies that the “*passionate resolve*” is ours instead of God’s. However, the KJV and NKJV has, “the good pleasure of *his* goodness” implying that the good desire Paul speaks of is God’s. This was the view of both Calvin and Barnes. Dr. Wanamaker comments:

On the whole, it seems best to take it [the good purposes] in connection with the readers because the parallel phrase “work of faith” [v. 11b] relates more naturally to the activity of the Thessalonians than to the work of God (*Thessalonians*, 1990).

Accordingly the NIV has: “your every desire for goodness.”

“*Every work prompted by your faith*” see NLT. We prefer the more literal translation of *ergon* as “**work**.” The NIV’s “**deed**” implies a one-time isolated action, which *ergon* can mean. But the kind of work that Paul is speaking of in order to see our good purposes fulfilled and God glorified seems best reflected in the another nuance of *ergon*: “that which one does as regular activity, *work, occupation, task*” (BAGD) which implies a more enduring, consistent, and perhaps even arduous working as described in section 1.6.B.

“*This is all made possible because of the grace of our God*” see NLT.

² For further on the theological understanding of faith, including *miracle faith*, see Book 6: *Biblical Faith* online at trainingtimothys.org/books/book-6-biblical-believing/.

³ Because the existence and function of Apostles and Prophets today is widely debated we leave them out of our discussion here. “Repair and prepare” trans. *katartismon*, “prepare, restore, equip” It was originally used as a medical term and specifically to mend a broken bone (BAGD). Related words in the NT mean to repair as in “*mending nets*” (Matt 4:21).

⁴ “*Special spiritual ability*” reflects Paul’s focus on spiritual gifts. “Faith here denotes the spiritual power given to each Christian for the discharge of his or her special responsibility” (F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, 1999). “Men’s opinions of themselves should be in proportion not to their natural capacities but to God’s gifts” (C. K. Barrett, *Romans*, 1991).

Chapter 2

The Responsibility of *Visionary Faith*

Living Up to Our Calling

Table of Topics

- A) Our position
- B) Our purpose
- C) Our power
- D) Our potential

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- The responsibility of *visionary faith* is to live up to our unique God-given calling.
- Our calling is who we are and what we have been given. Living up to that calling is making the most of these things. In other words, who we are and what we have been given is God's gift to us. What we become is our gift to God.
- Christians are the chosen and purchased sons and servants, daughters and disciples of Almighty God. There is no higher calling or position granted by God in the Universe than that.
- Our purpose is the "*bear much fruit*" in order that our "*Father is glorified*" and we "*prove to be [Christ's] disciples*" (John 15:8).
- The purpose of our life is not for *God* to prove how much He loves us, but for *us* to prove how much we love Him. It is *our* love that is now being tested and evaluated.
- Our *power* for our purpose is no less than God living in us.
- Our *potential* will differ according to our God-given abilities.

A) Our Position

Because of the return of Christ, we always pray that God will think you have lived up to His commanding invitation to experience your special privilege and responsibility as a Christian. (2 Thess 2:11)

Because of who we are and who God has made us, He has expectations. Who He has made us, what He has given us, and His resulting expectations are referred to in Scripture as our “calling.” This is an obscure word not often used in normal conversation. As demonstrated in the endnotes to chapter 1.1 it means God’s “*commanding invitation to experience a special privilege and responsibility.*” And we are to live so that when Christ returns we will be considered to “*have lived up*” to our Christian “calling.”

Likewise, Paul told the Ephesians, “*I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received*” (4:1). He described that calling as follows:

Before God the Father created the world, we were chosen in Christ to be dedicated to serve Him and without blame in His presence. Because of His unconditional love for us, God the Father predetermined that we would be adopted to belong to Him, through Jesus Christ. God the Father made this decision because doing what He wanted gave Him pleasure and would cause us to praise the greatness of His grace to us. (Eph 1:4-6) ¹

Before God the Father created the world, He chose us in Christ to be dedicated to serve Him and without blame in His presence. Because of His unconditional love for us, God the Father predestined that we would be adopted to belong to Him, through Jesus Christ. God the Father made this decision because doing what He wanted gave Him pleasure and would cause us to praise the greatness of His grace to us” (Eph 1:4-6).

There is no higher calling or position granted by God in the Universe than that.

B) Our Purpose

Because of our great *position*, we have been given a great *purpose*—serving, representing, and glorifying God. Surely Christ’s words apply to every Christian:

From everyone who has been given much, much will be requested; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (Luke 12:48)

Especially Christian leaders have “*been given much,*” and therefore, God’s expectations on our life are understandably high. He describes those expectations when He said to His disciples: “*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will last*” (John 15:16). He added, “*My Father is glorified when you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My followers*” (v. 8).

We should notice that repeated little word “much” (*polu*: “great in quantity, measure, much, extensive”). God expects *much* of us. The King expects every disciple of His to “*bear much fruit,*” making a significant impact at least in the lives of those in their family and church, and perhaps in their community, nation, and world.

The “*Father is glorified*” and we “*prove to be . . . followers*” when we “*bear much fruit.*” What happens if we do not “*bear much fruit*”? What happens if we refuse to embrace our God-given identity, succumb to fear, sin, and laziness and waste our life? Then God our Father Who loves, chose, and adopted us *will not* be glorified, nor will we be able to prove or claim to the world or even ourselves that we love God the Son who died for us. There is no option here. In order to glorify the Father and back up our claim to love the Son, we must “*bear much fruit.*” That’s what Jesus said.

Who we are is God’s gift to us. Who we become is our gift to God. Or as John Maxwell has put it more specifically: “God’s gift to me is my potential. My gift back to God is what I do with that potential.”² There is no greater measurement of our gratitude to God than what we do with our life.

C) Our Power

All of this could be rather intimidating and even overwhelming except for two things. First, this lofty *purpose* to “*bear much fruit*” is not only on account of our high *position*, but also our divine *power*--the Spirit of God living in us. Why should God expect so little of people who have Him living inside of them? Why should *we* expect so little of ourselves if we have God living inside of us? Our King said, “*I am in you*” (John 14:20). Either He is a liar or God actually lives inside of us! And we can be certain that God’s *power* in us is able to “*bear much fruit*” through us and accomplish God’s *purpose* for us.

D) Our Potential

The second thing that helps us embrace the incredible challenge of living so that “*God will think you have lived up to His commanding invitation to experience your special privilege and responsibility as a Christian*” is that He will evaluate us fairly (even generously) according to our individual *potential*.

We are reminded of the Parable of the Talents (cf. Matt 25:14-30). Jesus tells us that His Return “will be like a man going on a journey, who gathered his servants and entrusted them with his wealth” (Matt 25:14). And of course, the King’s purpose in telling the parable is to teach us that our eternal reward is dependent on what we do, with what He gave us.

Jesus notes that each person was given a unique amount of money “according to each person’s ability” (v. 15). The word “ability” comes from the Greek *dunamin* and variously means “the potential, power, capability, or resources to function in a certain way.”³ God knows the unique potential, capabilities, opportunities and resources each of us possesses. Accordingly, that calling that we are striving to be counted worthy of will differ with each individual. God is not expecting us to live up to the calling of another, but to make the most of the responsibilities, gifting, resources, opportunities, and *potential* He has uniquely given us.

John Ortberg writes of the amazing opportunity God gives us as portrayed in the Parable of the Talents:

There is a very important detail in this story, namely, why Jesus says the first employer responded “at once.” . . . He responds at once because the thought of losing the chance of a lifetime is intolerable. . . . The first servant realizes that as long as he lives, he will never have another chance like this. He resolves that he will allow nothing to interfere with his seizing this opportunity. He will not be sidetracked or distracted. Jesus says this is how it is with anyone who grasps what God offers.

This part of the story has very important implications. The Lord of the Gift has entrusted his property to you and me. Everybody receives a gift. This is not a story where some are gifted and some are not. We’re all called by God. . . .

The practical implication is, I must come to prize and appreciate what the Lord of the Gift has given to me. Let me get more personal: you’d better respond *at once*. The opportunity to use whatever gifts you have in the service of the Lord of the gift is the chance of a lifetime. But it will slip away from you unless you are very intentional. The time to respond is at once. . . .

This brings us to a second truth about the master. Somehow the third servant forgets an important fact of life. He forgets that the Lord of the Gift is coming back. But the day comes. . . .

Imagine watching all that God might have done with your life if you let him. . . . Imagine seeing what he might have done with your financial resources if you had trusted him to be generous. Imagine seeing what he might have done with your giftedness if you had trusted him enough to be daring. Imagine what he might have been in your relationships if you had trusted him enough to be fully truthful and fully loving. Imagine what he might have done with your character, if you dared to confess sin, acknowledge temptation, and pursue growth.

I know that I want my life to come as close as I can to realizing the goodness God intended for it. I know this is my only chance, and I know I want to minimize the gap between what shall be and what might have been as much as I can. . . .

You can drift: get up, go to work, come home, eat supper, watch TV, retire, and die. Or, you can take each moment and say, “God, this is yours.” You can offer him your spiritual gifting--not compared with anyone else--fully honed and developed as you can get it, identified with pristine clarity, cultivated with relentless perseverance, deployed with unstoppable vigor, submitted to sacrificial humility, and celebrated with raucous joy. (39-40, 47-49, 50-51)

All people are created equal in value, but not potential. God expects more of some than others. The man in the parable with “*ten talents*” was expected to produce twice as much for the King than the man with “*five talents*.”

Especially those in full-time ministry have by far the most responsibility. They are the “ten talent” kind of people and have certainly and relatively “*been given much*” more, and “*entrusted with much*” more time and ability to serve God than most Christians. Therefore, “*much will be requested*” and “*much more will be asked*” of them (Luke 12:48).

The Apostle wrote: “*If a person is eager, their gift to God is accepted according to what one has, not according to what they do not have*” (2 Cor 8:12). Surely this applies to all of the resources we have to give to others and God. Wisdom to accurately assess “*what one has*” is vital to a clear conscience. If we expect too little of ourselves we will not please God. If we expect too much we will be miserable, and constantly doubting that we are pleasing God.

Remember that God usually thinks we have been given more than we think. Remember the guy with “one talent” (Matt 25:15)? He didn’t think it mattered much what he did with it. He probably compared himself to the other two servants who had been given a lot more, and diminished the worth of himself and his God-given “talent” in his own

eyes. Accordingly, he had no *visionary faith* for his life. No urgency to make the most of what God had given him.

This can happen when Pastors compare their churches to other churches. Because their church is smaller, they can feel it and they are less valuable. And they treat their ministry as less valuable. We must resist comparing and highly value the ministry God has given us to be faithful with.

Perhaps our great responsibility to live up to our unique God-given calling can be summed up in one of the most challenging phrases (actually commands) in Scripture: *“Be very careful how you live. Do not be a fool but a wise person who is making the most of every opportunity God gives them”* (Eph 5:15-16). *“Every opportunity,”* translates the Greek *kairon* which means, “a moment of time.” “Making the most of every moment of time” means making the most of every relationship, responsibility, and resource God gives you. It means grabbing every moment of your life and redeeming its worth somehow by loving someone, accomplishing something, and wasting nothing all in service to God. Which is why you must *“be very careful how you live. . . making the most of every opportunity.”*

So many Christians fail to realize how much freedom, responsibility, and power God has given them. They think the outcome of their life depends primarily on what God intends and plans rather than what they decide and plan. This sounds more spiritual, but it isn’t. It excuses us from taking responsibility for our lives, making hard choices, and risking things for God. The Apostle Paul wrote:

Through the special ability God gave me, I laid a foundation like an expert builder. Now someone else is building on it. But everyone needs to be careful how they build.

This is because no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² *People can use a different materials to build on this foundation including gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay or straw.* ¹³ But on the Judgment Day, the value of a person’s work for God will be revealed. Fire will test the quality of each person’s work for God.

¹⁴ *If what a person has built for God survives the fire, the person will receive their reward.* ¹⁵ *But if their work is burned up, they will suffer loss. The person will be saved, but their works will be burned up.* (1 Cor 3:10-15)

Through the preaching of the Gospel, the Apostle Paul had “*laid a foundation*” of “*Jesus Christ*” in the lives of the Corinthian Christians. But he warned them that not only were they responsible for building on that foundation, but for how well they built on it and the materials they used. Notice the emphasis here on the Christian’s “*work*,” choices, and

responsibility, rather than God's work, choices, and responsibility. Again, *who we are is God's gift to us. What we become is our gift to Him.* This is why Paul wrote:

Because of the return of Christ, we always pray that God will think you have lived up to His commanding invitation to experience your special privilege and responsibility as a Christian. (2 Thess 2:11)

The great responsibility we have to live up to our calling of having God as our Father, and Jesus as our King, and the Spirit as our power is this: Making the most of your life by making the most of every opportunity, in light of who you are, what you have, and therefore what God expects of you, knowing that your King will evaluate you graciously, fairly, but meticulously on all of this.

And here is the essential difference between those who will, and those who will not live up to their God-given calling: *What they believe.* If we *believe* what God says about who we are, what we have, and what He expects of us, then we will live a completely different God-glorifying, truly meaningful, much-fruit-bearing, and challenging kind of life. Those children of God who do not know or believe who they are, what they have, and what their Father expects of them, will waste a good deal of their life.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father, we are in awe of Your plan for us. We are not robots. We are humans made in Your image and expected to make decisions and respond to Your calling to become who we are supposed to be. Help us believe this. Help us pursue this. And help us to even plan it.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What is our *position*?
- 2) What is our *purpose*?
- 3) What is our *power*?

- 4) How do we accurately assess our *potential*? Why is it important to do so?
- 5) How would you further explain: “Who we are is God’s gift to us. What we become is our gift to God”?
- 6) Which one of the following “Pastor Practices” can you apply now?

Pastor Practices

- It was stated that you and others are going to live according to what they believe. Therefore, do you see the value of teaching sound doctrine? Who we are and what we have are *theological* topics that every Christian must understand and be convinced of and it is our responsibility to ensure they do. Do not simply tell God’s people what they are supposed to do (the commands; e.g. Ephesians chapters 3-6), but also teach them what they are supposed to believe (the doctrines; Ephesians chapters 1-3).
- The knowledge of the high calling of God on our life can be intimidating and confusing for a Christian. In particular they can be very anxious to answer the question: “Am I doing enough?” The challenge is to *commend* those who are doing plenty and *correct* those who are being lazy.

This can best happen by talking to them individually. This is part of pastoring. Knowing your flock, knowing their gifts and abilities, and helping them make accurate assessments of their relationship with God and their service to Him.

- A Pastor of a church has a special responsibility to be pursuing a *visionary faith*. The church needs it, and it needs to come from the Pastor. Aubrey Malphurs, Professor of Pastoral Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary writes:

Not much happens without an inspiring, compelling vision. Not much was happening in Nehemiah’s day. The people had no vision. Jerusalem lay in ruins, and no one was motivated to do anything about it (cf. Neh 1:3). Then along came Nehemiah with a vision from God to rebuild the gates and walls of the city.

Visions are exciting and they energize people. They ignite a spark, the excitement that lives in ministry organization out of the mundane. They supply the fuel the lights the fire under a congregation. Leaders are able to stop putting out fires and start setting a few. A vision from God has a potential to turn a maintenance mentality into a ministry mentality. And when your

vision resonates with your values and mission, it generates the energy that fuels the accomplishment of the ministry task.

The right vision creates meaning in people's lives, providing them with a cause and giving them a sense of divine purpose. There are a part of something bigger than themselves, something great that God is accomplishing at this time and place in history. . .

With a shared vision, people see themselves not just as another "pew warmer" but as a vital part of a church is having a powerful impact on a lost and dying world. They are not simply in a church; they are on a crusade. They are part of a revolution that has the potential to change this world. . . .

Bill Hybels writes: "Vision is at the very core of leadership. Take a vision away from a leader and you cut out his or her heart." If leaders cannot see where they're going, maybe they are not leaders, at least not yet.

A vision is a clear, challenging picture of the future of the ministry, as you believe that it can and must be. . . . The vision is a picture of the future we seek to create. It depicts the church's preferred future. While, outside of biblical prophecy, we cannot predict the future, we can create the future. That is the function of the vision.⁴

Create a compelling, challenging, and clear vision for the sake of the men and women in your church.

Publications & Particulars

¹ "*God the Father*" is the object of Eph 1:4-6. "*Dedicated to serve Him*" is translated from the Greek *hagios*, "holy" and means just that. Holy in Scripture does not so much mean "sinless," but "separated" from other people or things for God's purposes. Which is why physical objects are often described as "holy" in the OT (see Exod 29:37; 30:26-29), which does not mean they were sinless, but dedicated to God.

"*Without blame in His presence*" translates the lit. Greek: "blameless before Him."

"*Unconditional love*" trans. *agapē* which the early Christians virtually invented to convey the love demonstrated in the cross of Christ. "*Agapē* is a beautiful word picture of sacrificial love. It is expressed in the fact that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). As such, *agapē* can be defined as unmerited and unwavering love (William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Zondervan, 2006), 429; see ch. 5.1, section B of *Biblical Apologetics* online at: <http://trainingtimothys.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/5.1-Virtue-Apologetics.pdf>.

"*Adopted to belong to Him*" is from the literal Greek: "adoption to Himself".

"*Doing what He wanted gave Him pleasure*" is based on God's "will" here being "a genitive of source showing that the good pleasure comes from His will" (Ephesians, Harold Hoehner [Baker, 2002], 199).

² John Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (1993).

³ *BAGD*.

⁴ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning* (2005).

Chapter 3

The Resolve of *Visionary Faith*

A passionate decision to do something for God

Table of Topics

A) The Freedom of *Visionary Faith*

B) The Passion of *Visionary Faith*

B.1) Doing what delights us to delight God

B.2) Divine guidance in our passion

B.3) Our responsibility for our passion

C) The Resolve of *Visionary Faith*

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- What is unique and exiting about *visionary faith* is *we get to choose specifically what we want to attempt for God.*
- If you asked God, “What specifically do you want me to do for You?” He would answer, “What do *you* want to do for me?!”
- God has put some qualifications on “whatever” we can ask, receive, and accomplish. But *do not miss the fact that the God of the Universe has still given us a “whatever.”*
- One reason that people crave extra-biblical revelation and beg God, “Just tell me what to do!” is that the freedom God gives them is intimidating and rather frightening.
- The *passions* that form the object of our *visionary faith* are experienced through our spiritual gifts.
- Our spiritual gifts are usually the most specific revelation of what God wants us to uniquely do with our life.
- All of which is why we had better have something more than *passion*, but rather a “passionate *resolve.*” Desires will accomplish nothing without *decisions.*

A) The Freedom of Visionary Faith

Because of the return of Christ, we always pray that God will think you have lived up to His commanding invitation to experience your special privilege and responsibility as a Christian.

We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted by your faith. (2 Thess 1:11-12) ¹

Now we get to what is really unique and rather exciting about *visionary faith*: *we get to choose specifically what we want to attempt for God.* The Apostle tells the Thessalonians that he is “*always*” praying that “*God*” would “*accomplish any passionate resolve to do good.*”

Of course our “*passionate resolve*” must be “*good*” in the sense that it relates to the desires and commands of God in some way. But notice the amazing freedom, creativity, and diversity being encouraged here! Beyond the general commands and principles of Scripture, God is not dictating specifically what we do to advance the Kingdom of God in our homes, churches, workplaces, communities, and world. In other words, if you asked God, “What specifically do you want me to do for You?” He would usually answer, “What do *you* want to do for Me?!”

Our mission and purposes must come straight from the explicit commands of Scripture. But our vision of specifically what we want to do for God within those commands comes from our own personal passions.

Forget the common notion that the very thing God wants you to do is the last thing you want to do. Unless God appears to you through an Angel, vision, etc. as He did biblical characters, He wants you to live according to your Spirit-empowered desires. Of course, “*It is God Who is working in you, giving you the desire and power to give Him pleasure*” (Phil 2:13), but like any good father, He encourages us to please Him in the way that would please us.

All of which seems remarkably similar to Christ’s promise to His disciples: “*If you continue to live in Me and My words continue to live in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be given to you*” (John 15:7).

“*Whatever you want.*” Obviously the “*whatever*” is conditioned on living in Him (being saved cf. vs. 6-7), living according to His word (cf. v. 7), and asking and seeking for the things that are consistent with the character, purposes, desires, and will of Jesus (cf. v. 16). Of course the God of the Universe would put some qualifications on “*whatever*” we can ask, receive, and accomplish. But do not miss the fact that the God of the Universe has still given us a “whatever.”

The thrust of Christ’s promises and instruction here is human freedom and creativity, not divine restrictions. If we simply love God

and people, then we have biblical warrant to believe that “*whatever*” good purpose, wish, or dream we want to do for God and people, is something that God is willing to “*accomplish*” “*by His power*” as Paul prayed (2 Thess 1:11).

Why does Jesus want to give you “*whatever you want*”? Because He wants you to live a God-glorifying life worthy of His calling. Accordingly, the entire statement of Jesus reads:

If you continue to live in Me and My words continue to live in you, ask whatever you want, and it will be given to you. My Father is glorified when you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My followers.

When you are asking for God-glorifying things you can believe that God desires to give them to you!

B) The Passion of Visionary Faith

B.1) Doing what delights us to delight God

In addition to the general and wonderful *position, purpose, and power* He gives us to accomplish our high calling as discussed in the previous chapter, God also gives each Christian a unique *passion*. And the Apostle said so:

We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good [eudokian], and every action prompted by your faith. (2 Thess 1:11)

The Greek noun *eudokian* means rather strong desire, will, or pleasure. Its noun and verb forms are variously translated in the NT as “*well-pleased*” (Matt 3:17); “*good pleasure*” (Matt 11:26; Eph 1:5, 9; Phil 2:13); “*delight*” (Matt 12:18; 2 Cor 12:10; 1 Thess 2:8); “*great joy*” (Matt 10:17 NLT); “*heart’s desire*” (Rom 10:1); “*longing of my heart*” (Rom 10:1 NLT).

In the Apostle’s first letter to the Thessalonians he had said that he was “*delighted [eudokoumen] to share with you not only the Good News of God but to share our lives with you as well*” (1 Thess 2:8). And in his second letter, in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12, he encourages them to pursue for God what would delight them.

And that is what God is asking us. What good purpose for Him would give you “*delight*,” make you “*well-pleased*,” give you “*good pleasure*,” and “*great joy*,” and would be your “*heart’s desire*” and the “*longing of [your] heart*”? *That* is the special thing God wants you to do.

That is what you are going to need to exercise *visionary faith* for. But God has done His part—He has given you a passion to do it!

Along these lines, Aubrey Malphurs, Professor of Pastoral Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary writes:

Passion is at the very core of vision and is key to discovering your vision. Your passion is what you feel strongly and care deeply about. It has to do with your emotions. It is an emotional concept. To get at your passion, you must tap into your emotions, asking what particular emotions move or motivate you when it comes to ministry and leading the church. Which experiences excite you and make you feel alive? Which bring focus and meaning to your life and ministry? ²

Likewise, Frederick Buechner wrote that God's specific will for our ministry is "the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need." ³

As we noted above, there is a popular notion that God's specific will for us is probably the last thing we want to do. Not so. Likewise, some claim that you must have "God's perfect plan" for doing something or He will not bless it. That sounds more spiritual, but unless Jesus, an Angel, or a vision is going to appear to you, you will not have any more certain specifics than what you have in Scripture.

Normally, God gives us the commands, but not the plans. And He is actually equally eager to bless any good plan for a good purpose, especially if God's people are united on it. All of those things are much more important for success than some supposed "God's perfect plan."

In confronting these myths, remember Paul's use of *eudokian* in regards to what the Thessalonian Christians might do for God. How do we know what we should exercise *visionary faith* in? What do we really *want* to do for God? What accomplishment would give us delight, pleasure, and even joy? *That* is the stuff that a biblical *visionary faith* is made of!

The Scriptures invite us to dream for and with God. Paul invited the Thessalonians to dream for God's glory. David experienced what Paul said he was constantly praying for. In Psalm 20 David encourages us to pray like this: "*May the LORD . . . give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. . . . May the LORD grant all your requests*" (vs. 1, 4-5).

And because "*the desire of your heart*" is a "*passionate resolve*" (2 Thess 1:11) to see something done for God- there is no greater joy available on Earth then when He grants that it be done.

B.2) Divine guidance in our passion

As noted, God's "whatever" can be a little overwhelming if we really understand it. But God does not leave us without any guidance to discerning what we should do for Him. The *passions* that form the object of our *visionary faith* are particularly experienced through our spiritual gifts and include:

Sacrificially serving the practical needs of others . . . helping others understand and obey the Scriptures . . . comforting others . . . giving money or possessions . . . leading others . . . having compassion for needy and hurting people (Rom 12:7-8).

These "*special spiritual desires and abilities according to the power of God working in us*" (v. 6) ⁴ result in desires to serve and glorify God in specific ways. Do you want to know specifically how God wants you to serve Him? Recognize your spiritual gift. What is the most important way to know what your spiritual gift is? Answer the question: What is my favorite way to serve God and His people?

This unique *passion* of our calling is reflected in Paul who generally introduced himself in no less than eight different epistles as: "*Paul, called to be an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will [and spiritual gift] of God*" (1 Cor 1:1; cf. Rom 1:1, 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1, Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1). Paul's specific calling revealed much of the "*good works God planned for [him] to do*" (Eph 2:10).

What was the result of the spiritual gifts God gave Paul? A "*passionate resolve.*" It was because of his grace gift of Apostleship that he said:

When I preach the Gospel I cannot boast about it because I am compelled to preach! It would be painful for me if I did not preach the Gospel! If I preach by my own choice I have a reward. But if I am preaching because God is compelling me then it is because God has given me a special desire and ability. (1 Cor 9:16-17) ⁵

Paul's passion for preaching the Gospel, even in the face of great dangers and difficulties, seemed unquenchable. So much so that he described his ministry as "not voluntary." In more literal Greek Paul was saying his ministry to preach the Gospel was: "a necessity imposed on me." ⁶ These words meant "pressure," "a compulsion by force," "an obligation" and "to be urgent." ⁷

The Apostle's spiritual gift, and the *passion* that accompanied it, was precisely what he was talking about when he said: "*I do not value my life as much as completing the mission and ministry the Lord Jesus gave me which is declaring the Gospel of God's grace*" (Acts 20:22). ⁸ Nothing was going to stop Paul from trying to do what he felt God had called, gifted, and compelled him to do. And the source of that unique

“task” and passion was the supernatural spiritual gift of apostleship that God had given him (cf. Eph 3:1-7)

The same is true for you. Your spiritual gifts are usually the most specific divine revelation of what God wants you to uniquely do with your life. This is why the Apostle Peter commanded:

God has given each Christian a special spiritual ability. So use it to serve one another. Then you will be faithful with the kind of spiritual gift God has entrusted to you. (1 Pet 4:10) ⁹

The “*passionate resolve*” that God wants from you will come from deciding to be faithful with the spiritual gifts and desires He has given you. Therefore, your spiritual gifts are an important indicator of your unique God-given calling and *potential* and what He is expecting of you, as discussed in the previous chapter.

“*Like our bodies, Christ's people have many parts and those parts have different functions*” (Rom 12:4):

There are different kinds of spiritual desires and abilities given by God . . . There are different ways of using those spiritual gifts . . . Those gifts have different effects . . . All these special spiritual desires and abilities are the work of the same Spirit, and He decides which ones to give to which person. (1 Cor 12:4-6, 11)

God allows you to choose most things in your life. Which Christian to marry. Where to live. What you will wear or eat today. But God chooses your spiritual gift(s). You did not even get the shape of your nose from God. That was random genetics. But God did uniquely choose your spiritual personality—what kind of Christian you would be. A Teacher, Leader, Pastor, Evangelist, Helper, Giver, or especially merciful.

Not only is your life not your own, your desires to serve God are not your own. The specific desires you have for how you want to love God and people is from God. Whether you decide to act on it is your decision. The Apostle Paul described both of these when he wrote:

It is because of God's special grace toward me that I am an Apostle. And I have not wasted the spiritual gift and power God gave me. On the contrary, I have worked harder than all of the other Apostles. But it has not been just me, but the power of God working through me. (1 Cor 15:10) ¹⁰

Paul recognized that God's power had given him the desires and abilities to be an Apostle. But Paul still had to be faithful with the gift and work very hard to make the most of it. Who you are and what you have is God's gift to you. What you become and what you do are your gifts to God.

God decided your spiritual gift(s), because “*He decides which ones to give to which person*” (1 Cor 12:11). Which is why, like Paul, our spiritual gifts are the best indicator of the “*good works God planned for us to do*” and for which “*We are God’s special creation, recreated through Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:10). All of which is why it is a shame to envy the spiritual gifts of another, and a waste of our life to try to copy them. Being who God made us is vital to all that we are talking about here.

Accordingly, our spiritual gifts will greatly influence the specific “*passionate resolve*” (2 Thess 1:11) that our *visionary faith* will pursue. The fundamental characteristic of the spiritual gifts being given by God today is *desire*, not power. The power comes from the supernatural desire that comes with our gift. If an Evangelist pursued his personal passion for God, he might plant a church . . . or several of them. A Teacher may start a seminary. A person gifted in mercy might establish a homeless shelter. Those gifted in leadership and serving might try all kinds of things. And a person gifted in giving might financially support any of them.

All of these examples of *visionary faith* exercised by Christians are precisely why the vast majority of the hospitals, orphanages, and even schools were started throughout the vast majority of human history. Their Christian founders did not normally have a direct divinely authoritative revelation from God specifically telling them to create those hospitals, orphanages, and schools, when and where they did. Rather, in obedience to the general command to love God and our neighbor, they *pursued human plans to obey God’s commands*, and did something for God to benefit people.

Virtually every advancement of the Kingdom of God on Earth has been a result of *visionary faith*- someone deciding to do something for God. As Richard Day has written:

Every golden era in human history proceeds from the devotion and righteous passion of some single individual. There are no real mass movements. It just looks that way. There is always one man who knows his God and knows where he is going [or better- what he or she wants to do for God] ¹¹

B.3) Our responsibility for our passion

Our desires for ministry and responsibilities in life are God’s gifts to us, and we must be faithful with them. In particular, if we believe such desires for ministry are merely from us, we will think it is optional in God’s eyes as to whether or not we pursue them. But pursuing those desires is *not* optional because those desires are from God and they are the essence of our spiritual gifts.

God's gifts are incredibly valuable. They are the grace and power He gives us to serve Him and reap rewards for that service for all eternity. They are God's start-up investment to give us the opportunity to build something that will last forever. If you don't use your gifts, you won't serve God much, and you won't have much to show for your life for all eternity. If you neglect your special desires and abilities to serve God, you will be one of those who "*suffer loss*" (1 Cor 3:15) on that Day Christ evaluates your life.

Most Christians are not serious enough about being faithful with the gifts, desires, and abilities God has given them to serve Him. Paul wrote: "*If God entrusts you with something then you must be trustworthy so He considers you faithful*" (1 Cor 4:2). Why? Paul said, "*It is the Lord Who will evaluate me*" (v. 4). You will be evaluated on whether or not you were faithful with the unique gifts and desires God gave you to serve Him.

C) The Resolve of Visionary Faith

All of which is why we had better have something more than *passion*, but rather a "*passionate resolve*." Desires, no matter how strong, will accomplish nothing without *decisions*. Not only the world, but the Kingdom of God is full of people with all kinds of desires. But they are *never* planted and given a chance to grow and bear fruit because a resolution, a determination, a commitment is never made.

It should be noticed that Paul is expecting the Thessalonians to not just have desires for God, but to make decisions for God. While the word *eudokian* certainly means a desire or delight, it also includes the idea of a *decision*. Accordingly, we wrote in an endnote in the previous chapter:

Eudokian is not just a "good intention" (NLT 1996), but a strong desire that has been decided upon. Thus the RSV, NRSV, and ESV translate it "resolve" in our text, which Webster's defines as: "to reach a firm decision about." But *eudokian* is not just a decision, but a decision on a desire, thus our translation "*passionate resolve*."

This "*passionate resolve*" is wonderfully reflected in God's own desires and plans for us. The Apostle wrote:

Because of His unconditional love for us, God the Father predestined that we would be adopted to belong to Him, through Jesus Christ. God the Father made this decision because doing what He wanted gave Him pleasure [eudokian] . . . God the Father has now revealed to us His secret desires for Christ, a plan to fulfill His own good pleasure [eudokian]. (Eph 1:5, 9).¹²

Do you see how God's *passion* for us resulted in a *decision*, a resolve to save us? And that decision would seem to define just about everything God has been doing for the last several thousand years. It has certainly "guided" Him. God wants us to reflect His image in this world. He is a purposeful, passionate, planning, and deciding God. And it is His own purposes, passions, planning, and decisions that direct His own life, actions, and experiences. God wants us to live with such powerful purpose, great passion, careful plans, and a *resolve* that keeps us fighting for what we want to do for God no matter how hard it gets.

Remember. That decision that God made to save us cost Him a lot of pain and sacrifice. What God wanted to do required the death of His own Son. We too need to count the cost of our vision for God as best as we can, and decide beforehand if our "*passionate resolve*" is enough. Because not only is the *requirement* of accomplishing our *visionary faith* going to be a great deal of hard, sacrificial work, but there are real *risks* in such endeavors as well. These topics are taken up in the next two chapters.

Take a moment to pray what Paul prayed for the Thesalonians: "*We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted by your faith*" (1 Thess 1:11).

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Father, we thank You for Your decision to do something for us. In gratitude, we want to make a decision to do something for You. Help us pull our passion out of our heart, expressing it with our lips to our God to make it more real. If we talk to You about what we want to do, then the ministry we choose will gain the kind of clarity and conviction a God-glorifying vision needs.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) In terms of the types of *biblical faith*, what is unique and rather exhilarating about *visionary faith* as we define it?
- 2) We claim that if you asked God, "What specifically do you want me to do for You?" He would answer, "What do *you* want to do for me?!"

Do you agree or disagree? If you agree, what are the ramifications of this?

- 3) Why do we claim that God is not in the habit of telling us specifically what to do for Him? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 4) God has put some qualifications on “whatever” we can ask, receive, and accomplish. What are these?
- 5) Are you ready to answer the question: What good purpose for Him would give you “delight,” make you “well-pleased,” give you “good pleasure,” and “great joy,” and would be your “heart’s desire” and the “longing of [your] heart” to do for God?
- 6) What guidance does God give us regarding what specifically we should be doing for Him?
- 7) What is our responsibility regarding our spiritual gifting?
- 8) Why is it important to make *decisions* and not just have *desires*?
- 9) In what way has God illustrated the principles we have discussed in this chapter?

Pastor Practices

- Have you ever stopped to ask yourself what you would really like to do for God if you could? Honor God by stopping and asking that question. Perhaps you have been so concentrated on doing your “duty,” that you don’t even know your passion. Duty is good, and a necessary part of life. But God also wants us to have passions, passions for Him. And in the long run, we will bless people and God more by doing our passion rather than just our duty.
Think about it. Pray about it. Research it. What is the need in the Kingdom of God where you live or on the other side of the world that you would go after if God promised His help? Then *write it down* in your journal.
- Then *make a decision*. Not a hasty one. Not a merely emotional one. Get a lot of counsel from those whom your vision will affect. Make a careful decision. But *make it a determined decision* with real resolve—like God did when He “decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ”

(Eph 1:5). *That* was resolve. And your resolve will honor Him even though you cannot be certain of the outcome. That's why it is called visionary *faith*.

- Now, *do something* at least once a week that gets you closer to accomplishing what you want to do for God so that you “may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given” to you.

Publications & Particulars

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- ¹ For justification of our translation of 2 Thessalonians 11B see endnote in previous chapter 6.10.
- ² Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning* (Baker, 2005), 156.
- ³ Quoted by John Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*, 2001, p. 60.
- ⁴ The topic of Romans 12:6 ff. is spiritual gifts through the power of God's grace which result in special desires and abilities.
- ⁵ “Painful” trans. *ouai* “statement of pain or displeasure, woe, alas” (*BAGD*). “God is compelling me” trans. *akōn*, “unwillingly” (*BAGD*). “A special desire and ability” trans. *oikonomian* “stewardship, responsibility to manage, commission” (*BAGD*). Paul is referring to his spiritual gift of apostleship which compels him to preach the Gospel (see Col 1:25; Eph 3:2) for the use of the same Gr. word in the same way.
- ⁶ *Lexham Greek-English New Testament (LGENT)* (Logos, 2010).
- ⁷ *BAGD*.
- ⁸ There are two options for Paul's meaning. The NLT has: “But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me.” This implies that Paul was evaluating the value of his life based on how well he completed his mission for Jesus. This is an attractive translation but the Gr. conjunction “I consider my life as not worth anything in order to [ōs] [not “if” or “unless I”] complete the mission.” Therefore the NIV is better: “I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race.”
- ⁹ “*Special spiritual ability*” refers to spiritual gifts which is the topic of the text.
- ¹⁰ “*Spiritual gift*” reflects it is the gift of apostleship being spoken of. “*I have not wasted*” trans. *ou kenē egenēthē*, lit. “has not been in vain.” Paul is saying God's gift to him has not been wasted because he worked hard with it.
- ¹¹ John Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 1993, p. 169.
- ¹² “*Unconditional love*” trans. *agapē* “Agapē is a beautiful word picture of sacrificial love. It is expressed in the fact that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). As such, *agapē* can be defined as unmerited and unwavering love.” (William D. Mounce, Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words, 2006). “*Adopted to belong to Him*” is from the literal Greek: “adoption to Himself”. “*Doing what He wanted gave Him pleasure*” is based on God's “will” here being “a genitive of source showing that the good pleasure comes from His will” (Harold Hoehner, Ephesians, 2002).

Chapter 4

The Risks of Visionary Faith*They Come with the Territory***Table of Topics**

A) The Necessity of Risks in *Visionary Faith*

B) Failure is Not an Option, But a Guarantee

C) Foolishness is Not Faith

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Faith and a trust in God are needed to even embark on a journey of *visionary faith*, let alone endure one. Our faith cannot be in our plans because we have not received them by divine revelation. Rather, our faith must be in a Person, the One Who is personally encouraging us to take risks for Him.
- Fear is the opposite of faith and will strangle, suffocate, and *kill visionary faith*. Our perception of God is the real issue that decides whether or not we will take the risks needed.
- In our pursuit of *visionary faith* there will be failures along the way, and we may never actually accomplish what we desire.
- Like Joshua, we serve God in enemy territory and real risk comes with the territory.
- Unnecessary waste, mistakes, and hurts *do not please God*. In our *visionary faith to pursue human plans to fulfill God's commands*, He also wants us to be wise and careful.
- Testing God is coercing Him to do the miraculous because we are doing something unnecessarily harmful and foolish.

A) Some Conclusions on the Risks of Visionary Faith

We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted by your faith. (1 Thess 1:11)

The association of churches the author belongs to planted churches in Berlin and Amsterdam at relatively the same time. A great deal of leadership, preparation, time, money, research, and sacrifice was invested in these efforts. Unfortunately, a short time later the Pastor of the Amsterdam church was caught in adultery and the Pastor of the Berlin church was abandoning it, returning home, and fairly bitter about the whole thing. A lot of people were very disappointed and hurt. A lot of resources were wasted. Was it a mistake for their sponsoring churches to send these men to lead these church plants? Absolutely! Was it a God-pleasing faith that led them to do so? Absolutely!

Likewise, a current member of our church graduated from Bible college and shortly thereafter was asked by someone from his home town to return and establish a city-wide youth ministry. He was promised a salary for an extended period of time. After much prayer and counsel he decided to move his family and purchased a home. On move-in day he received a phone call informing him that the promised salary would not be available. He labored valiantly for several months trying to raise the necessary funds for the ministry, but in the end, the endeavor failed. Was it a mistake for him to trust the man who promised him a salary? Absolutely! Was it a God-pleasing faith that led him to do so? Absolutely!

Unlike *empowering faith* in the promises of Scripture, there is some real risk involved in *visionary faith*. God's biblical promises on which *empowering faith* is based will *never* fail. Our *human plans to fulfill God's commands* often will. Therefore many do not embark on such a journey for God. This is why in the context of doing "*any passionate resolve to do good . . . so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him*" the Apostle mentions the necessity of "*action prompted by your faith*" (2 Thess 1:11).

Faith and a trust in God are needed to even embark on a journey of *visionary faith*, let alone endure one. Our faith cannot be in our plans because we have not received them by divine revelation. Rather, our faith must be in a Person, the One Who is personally encouraging us to take risks for Him.

Remember again the guy who was given "one talent" by "his master" (Matt 25:15, 21). Why did he hide his "talent in the ground" (v. 25)? He told the master: "*I was afraid.*" More specifically, he was afraid of the master, believing him to be "a hard man" (v. 24). The word used here is

sklēros and meant harsh, cruel, merciless. Of course this servant's belief was wrong.¹ But disillusioned Christians can be greatly tempted to believe the same.

Nonetheless, we need to notice two things here. First, fear is the opposite of faith and will strangle, suffocate, and *kill visionary faith*. Secondly, our perception of God is the real issue which decides whether or not we will take the risks needed in *visionary faith*.

In pursuing our *visionary faith* and our *human plans to accomplish God's commands*, we will encounter many things that will be a little scary. Maybe even really scary. Perhaps we need the help of others, and cannot be sure of their response. Perhaps we need resources to try something and it might fail. Perhaps there is the risk of embarrassment. Perhaps our *visionary faith* leads us to do something in which we could even die. What we want to do for God will require many "*actions prompted by your faith*."

More specifically we could say here that *visionary faith* requires courage. Of course, the Christian life itself demands courage, the Apostle telling all the Corinthians, "*Be courageous*" (1 Cor 16:13). But attempting great things for God especially requires courage. This is precisely why God told Joshua before he embarked on His mission for God:

"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I promised to give to their forefathers. Be strong and very courageous. . . . This is My command: Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged, because the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." (Josh 1:6-7, 9)

God was determined to do everything He needed for Joshua's mission to succeed. But one thing He required of Joshua was courage. Why did God tell him three times to be courageous? Because we can easily forget and courage is so desperately needed if we are to do anything in this world for God. And remember, Joshua was leading families into enemy territory to literally fight with swords and spears and risk their lives. Yet even in such a daunting and serious endeavor, God commanded courage.

In fact, John Ortberg writes:

The single command in Scripture that occurs more often than any other—God's most frequently repeated instruction—is formulated in two words: *Fear not*. I think God says, "fear not" so often because fear is the number one reason human beings are tempted to avoid doing what God asks them to do. Lloyd Ogilvie notes there are 366 "fear not" verses in the Bible—one for every day of the year, including one for leap year! If you live in fear, you will never

experience the potential that God has placed in you. As we have seen, growth always involves risk, and risk always involves fear. ²

We are reminded of an interesting statement from the Lord: “*From the time of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it*” (Matt 11:12³). Jesus seems to be referring to two things regarding the “*advancing*” of “*the Kingdom of Heaven*” on Earth. First, it requires “forceful” people who are not content with the status quo and not afraid to go against it and to cause changes. Secondly, there is a warning that in such endeavors, “*violent people*” will be “*attacking it.*” Both our proactive pursuits to advance God’s Kingdom, and our reaction to attacks against us, will require courage. Only with courage can God advance His Kingdom on this Earth through us.

John Ortberg rather humorously writes of the risk of just being human:

If you are looking for absolute safety, you chose the wrong species. You can stay home in bed, but that may make you one of the half million Americans who require emergency room treatment each year for injuries sustained while falling out of bed.

You can cover your windows, but that may make you one the 10 people a year who accidentally hang themselves on the cords of their venetian blinds.

You can hide your money in a mattress, but that may make you one of tens of thousands of the people who go to the emergency room each year because of wounds caused by handling money, everything from paper cuts to (for the wealthy) hernias.

If you step up to the plate, you may strike out. The greatest hitters in the world fail two times out of three. ⁴

Your *visionary faith* will encourage your church to take the necessary risks to pursue *human plans to accomplish God’s commands*. Dr. Malphurs writes:

A shared vision fosters a congregation’s willingness to take risks. This is especially true in church planting situations. When the point person or leader pastor cast the vision, everyone knows what needs to be done.

But the question is, how will we do it? Sometimes we know the answer, but most often we do not. Consequently, ministry for Christ becomes an exciting adventure into the world of the unknown. We intend something from Christ in it does not work. We attempt to something else and it does work. The much of what we’re doing is experimental, it is not ambiguous.

It is perfectly clear to all involve the reason we do it. It is for god in the savior. People are not asking for guarantees success. They all know that no guarantees exist, yet people are committed any way. The risks are great, but so is the God we serve and the vision he has given us. ⁵

B) Failure is Not an Option, But a Guarantee

In our *pursuit of human plans to obey God's commands* there will be a number of failures along the way, and we may never actually accomplish what we are endeavoring to do for God. We are not gods, this is not Heaven yet, we have a great enemy, and God is expecting us to live out our faith with all the weaknesses of being human. Therefore, failure is not an option- it is a guarantee.

One of the great obstacles to *visionary faith* and the “*passionate resolve*” (2 Thess 1:11) it requires, is that this kind of faith involves real risk. In the process of pursuing your plans, precious resources might be wasted, serious mistakes made, and even people might get hurt. All unintentionally, but still, very realistically.

We are reminded of the story in Joshua chapters 7-8. The Israelites had a general command to take over the land, and even a promise they would do so (1:1-6). After a victory over Jericho, we read:

Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, near Beth Aven to the east of Bethel, and told them, “Go and investigate the region.” So the men went and spied out Ai. When they returned to Joshua, they said, “Not all the people will have to go in battle against Ai. Send two or three thousand men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few enemies are there.” (7:1-3)

This was good. Joshua was doing his research to determine how to accomplish the next part of the task God had given him. And the spies concluded correctly, as we learn later, that the whole town was only 12,000 men and women (8:25), and only a relatively small portion of them would probably have been experienced fighting men. “*So about three thousand [Israelite] men went to capture Ai*” (v. 4).

This was *visionary faith*. Joshua did not have any specific revelation regarding Ai, as he did Jericho (6:1-5) and later Ai (8:1-2). And there is no divine rebuke anywhere implying that Joshua should have had more specific divine revelation. He was simply and legitimately pursuing *human plans to accomplish God's commands*. But the plans failed horribly:

So about three thousand men went to take Ai, but they were defeated by the men of Ai. About thirty-six Israelites were killed.

The men from Ai chased the Israelites from their city gate as far as the stone quarries and slaughtered them in the hills. (vs.4-5)

These people were doing God's will. And thirty-six of them died. Joshua had done his research. But he concluded wrong and his enemy made him pay dearly for it.

Like Joshua, we serve God in enemy territory and real risk comes with the territory. We cannot forget that, like the Israelites, we have an enemy that seeks "*only to steal and kill and destroy*" (John 10:10) God's people and God's work. *Pursuing human plans to obey God's commands* and fulfill the Great Commission is a real battle where people get hurt and even killed.

"*Our fight against the devil is not against humans*" like Joshua's was. "*We are fighting against the rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against spiritual powers in this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the spiritual realms*" (Eph 6:12). And God does not promise our enemy will never touch us. Even if we are doing all of the right things. In fact, He promised just the opposite. "This world will hate you . . . they will persecute you. . . . In this world you will have trouble" (John 15:19; 16:33; cf. 2 Tim 3:12). Especially if you are seriously trying to serve God.

As a leader, has any of your wrong decisions hurt people? Such risks go with the territory of *visionary faith*. Have you spoken with leaders of Christian missionary organizations ministering in radical Islamic countries? Missionaries are failing to influence Muslims and are dying in their failed efforts to do so. Yet they are exercising *visionary faith*.

The big mistake so many make in *visionary faith* is that they automatically think that a failure means they have done something wrong. Regarding the story above we learn later that God had removed His blessing and protection from the Israelite army because of Achan's sin (cf. vs. 10-12, 16-21). But Joshua had not done anything wrong. Neither had the spies. And there is no indication in the text whatsoever that the thirty-six warriors who were cruelly "*slaughtered in the hills*" (v.5) had done anything but obey God by obeying Joshua. Isn't it amazing what God might allow in our endeavors to simply serve Him?

Accordingly, we must be extremely careful not to assume that we or someone else has done something wrong when we experience failures in our ministry. Advancing the Kingdom and fulfilling the Great Commission are extremely hard tasks on this Earth, and as we have said, failure comes with the territory. In our *pursuit of human plans to accomplish God's commands* we will encounter many things that will feel like failure. But in fact, are all a part of God's plan. Along these lines, John Ortberg writes:

Failure is not an event, but rather a *judgment* about an event. Failure is not something that happens to us. It is a way we think about outcomes.

Before Jonas Salk developed a vaccine for polio that finally worked, he tried two hundred unsuccessful ones. Somebody asked him, “How did it feel to fail two hundred times?”

“I never failed two hundred times in my life,” Salk replied. “I was taught not to use the word ‘failure.’ I just discovered two hundred ways how not to vaccinate for polio.” . . .

Sir Edmund Hillary made several unsuccessful attempts at scaling Mount Everest before he finally succeeded. After one attempt he stood at the base of the giant mountain and shook his fist at it. He said in defiance: “I’ll defeat you yet because you’re as big as you’re going to get—but *I’m still growing.*” . . .

To run the best race you can, to give it everything that is in you, and win—that is glorious. To run the race, to give your best and lose—that’s painful. But it is not failure. *Failure is refusing to run the race at all.* ⁶

Nonetheless, even our innocent mistakes in *pursuing human plans to accomplish God’s commands* can really be costly and painful. Accordingly, we read the following response of the people and Joshua to this failure:

Because of the defeat the people were overwhelmed with fear and lost all their courage. Then Joshua and the leaders tore their clothes, threw dust on their heads, and fell to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there until evening.

Then Joshua cried out, “Sovereign LORD, why did You bring us across the Jordan River just to have us destroyed by the Amorites? We should have just been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say? Israel has needed to run away from its enemies. Now the Canaanites and the other people living in this country will hear about our great defeat and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the Earth. And then what will happen to the honor of your great name? (7:5-9)

Joshua was losing that courage that God had repeatedly commanded him to have. So would we if thirty-six people died under our leadership. Joshua and the people were tempted to *really* fail here by giving up on the whole mission and even God Himself. But God encouraged Joshua. We read: “*The LORD said to Joshua, ‘Stand up! Why are you lying down on your face?’*” (7:10).

That is God’s attitude toward our failures: stop wallowing in fear and resume working in faith. Why? Because the mistakes in such

circumstances are innocent. Even if people die. Obviously this is an extreme example, but again, real people are really dying in the *pursuit of human plans to accomplish God's commands* in the Great Commission. Are you getting a better idea of why an especially *courageous faith* is needed for *visionary faith*?

C) Foolishness is Not Faith

We need to add an important note here. Unnecessary waste, mistakes, and hurts *do not please God*. In our *visionary faith to pursue human plans to fulfill God's commands*, He also wants us to be wise and careful. We are commanded to be good stewards of the resources God gives us (cf. 1 Cor 4:2), including our time, money, and people.

If we deceive ourselves into thinking that our extra-biblical plans and decisions are the direct revelation of God, we will be tempted to be more careless in pursuing our *visionary faith*. This is another reason it is important to distinguish between *empowering faith* and *visionary faith*. *Empowering faith* is believing and pursuing the sure commands and promises of God written in Scripture. *Visionary faith* is pursuing specific and merely *human plans* to accomplish something *we have decided* to do for God, based on the general commands of Scripture.

People constantly mistake *visionary faith* for *empowering faith*. They are always tempted to believe their own ideas and desires are the direct revelation and command of God. Many teachers speak as if the greater the foolishness and risk in an endeavor- the greater faith it reflects. They forget that an Angel from God *told* Gideon to attack an army of thousands with 300 men. From a pillar of fire God *told* the Israelites to march around Jericho for seven days. And if the Angel of the Lord appears to you and tells you similarly crazy things to do then you had better do them. But you had better have more than just a thought in your head.

Only God has the authority to devise a foolish looking plan. And we are only required to follow them if God objectively, even physically appears to us to tell us a more specific plan beyond Scripture. Apart from a vision, apparition, or Angel, we are expected to do careful research, obtain abundant counsel, and think through the details of what we plan to do for God. Unnecessary foolishness, mistakes, waste, and hurts do not please God- not even when we put the label of "faith" on it.

It is important, therefore, to understand the difference between *trusting* and *testing* God. The devil wants the one and not the other as illustrated in his temptations of our Lord:

Then the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the highest point of the temple. The devil said, "If you are the Son of

God then jump. The Scriptures say: ‘God will command His Angels to protect you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not even hurt your foot against a stone.’ But Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the LORD your God.’” (Matt 4:5-7)

Unless God clearly commanded Jesus to “jump” from “*the highest point of the temple*” it would have been foolish to do so. And it would have been foolish and disrespectful to God to expect Him to make up for such foolishness by miraculously intervening. Testing God is coercing Him to do the miraculous because we are doing something unnecessarily harmful and foolish. Trusting God is putting confidence in His written promises and commands, and not interpreting them out of context as the devil did here. ⁷

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our heavenly Father, it is life changing to realize You actually want us to risk resources and love to accomplish things for You. And we take comfort that You are watching the whole thing to bless and help us along the way. Help us to trust You enough to risk something for You.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why do we say that ultimately our faith must be in a Person rather than our plans?
- 2) Why does *visionary faith* require courage?
- 3) Why do we say that failure is not an option in pursuing visionary faith?
- 4) How is God’s relationship with Israel comforting for us in our own failures?
- 5) What are other biblical examples of godly people experiencing failure or little fruit in their ministries?
- 6) Why is wisdom an important part of *visionary faith*?

7) What is the difference between trusting and testing God?

Publications & Particulars

¹ Some would interpret the Parable of the Talents as suggesting that Christ is being portrayed as harsh and cruel. Indeed, it is clear that the master is to be seen as Christ Who will return and evaluate His servants. But there are several considerations that dispel the servant's accusations.

First, again the master does not repeat that he is "*a hard man*," implying that he disagrees with the servant's perspective.

In the parallel Parable of the Minas in Luke 19:12-27 a different Greek word is used to refer to the "*king*" (v. 15) being "*a hard man*" (v. 21, 22). It is *austēros* meaning "being strict in requirement" but not harsh or cruel as is included in the meaning of *sklēros* used in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew.

Secondly, it may be significant that Matthew uses two different words for "know" in the Parable. In verse 24 the servant says, "*I knew [egnōn] that you are a hard man.*" However, the master replies, "*you knew [ēdeis] that I harvest where I have not sown.*" These words are derived from *gnosis* and *oida*, and while they are often used synonymously to refer simply to "knowing," the W. E. Vine remarked:

While *ginōskō* frequently implies an active relation between the one who "knows" and the person or thing "known," *oida* expresses the fact that the object has simply come within the scope of the "knower's" perception." And a perception that could be false.

In other words, the master may be implying that harshness was the wicked servant's personal experience and perception of the master. This would accord well with the obvious fact that this servant was an unbeliever, and in a world of evil and pain, God can be perceived as "*a hard man*," although incorrectly so.

Nonetheless, while the master (Christ) denies he is harsh, he admits being a master who is "*harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.*" While the wicked servant perceived that as being harsh and cruel, it could also be understood as the legitimate right of a master like Christ. Creation proved that God can make something out of nothing, and as Creator He has unlimited rights over that creation. The statement from the master's (Christ's) perspective could be referring to either His supernatural abilities or His divine authority.

Along these lines, John Nolland comments in his *NIGTC* on Matthew regarding the description of Christ as "*harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed*":

Perhaps we are to understand that there is something true about these, if not exactly what the slave takes from them. The one who reaps where he has that sown is one who proves to be master of the situation, one who is ultimately dominant. God asserts his claim to be the lord of all and will ultimately make good that claim.

To those who are alienated from him this may well look like taking unfair advantage, that assertion of his superior power to the hurt and loss of others. The parable acknowledges that this is how things may seem, but it does not specifically address the question of the theodicy thereby posed. For the parable, God's right as the lord of all takes precedence. He does not need to defend himself against his detractors. The parable places the spotlight on the behavior of the third slave, not on the question of the validity of these images of his master. It is

content to imply that the images are not entirely right, but they are not fully wrong either. (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Eerdmans, 2005], 1019).

² John Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat* (Zondervan, 2001), 117-118, 127.

³ The NLT of Matthew 11:12 is very similar to the NIV. However, this is not an easy verse to translate. Dr. MacArthur writes:

The form of *biazō* (from which *suffers violence* comes) can be read as either a Greek passive or middle voice.

In the middle voice the verb carries the active idea of applying force or of entering forcibly—in which case the translation would be, “The kingdom of heaven is vigorously pressing itself forward, and people are forcefully entering it.” With its focus in John the Baptist, the kingdom moved relentlessly through the godless, sin-darkened human system that opposed it.

The first of those two interpretations is negative and the second is positive; but both are true [as reflected in the NLT and NIV]. As already seen, the negative is illustrated by the persecution of John. The positive is illustrated by the many people that John's preaching led to the Lord. . . .

Although both interpretations are possible and true, the second seems preferable in the context. . . . Following the Lord demands earnest endeavor, untiring energy, and the utmost exertion. To be a Christian is to swim against the flow of the world, to go against its grain, because the adversary—satan, his demons, and the world system—are extremely powerful.

⁴ John Ortberg p. 20.

⁵ Malphurs, 147.

⁶ Ortberg, 22, 24, 147.

⁷ Leon Morris comments on Matthew 4:4-7:

The servants of God cannot demand that God should keep on intervening with miraculous provision for their needs. To jump from a height and then look to God to avert the natural consequences of such an act is just such an offense. Furthermore, it is worse than what happened at Massah, for at least the people there were in real need of water [cf. Deut 6:16].

What satan is suggesting is that Jesus should needlessly thrust himself into danger; he would be creating a hazard where none previously existed. And for what? To compel God to save him miraculously. It is a temptation to manipulate God, to create a situation not of God's choosing in which God would be required to act as Jesus dictated. Jesus rejects the suggestion. He prefers the way of quiet trust in the heavenly Father, a trust that needs no test. (*The Gospel According to Matthew* [Eerdmans, 1992], 76.

Chapter 5

The Risks of Visionary Faith II

Table of Topics

- A) Disappointment is Godly
- B) Faith is More Important than Fruit
- C) The Real Risk of *Visionary Faith*

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- The sovereignty of God over failure is best reflected in the “failures” He Himself has experienced.
- Pursuing a *visionary faith* for God is not safe. We can be sure to encounter the same losses and hurts that men of God in Scripture experienced.
- Jesus’ own disciples were commanded to travel days on dusty roads to places where they would bear no fruit- as they pursued even Jesus’ plan to fulfill God’s command.
- After all the labor the Apostle Paul invested in the province of Asia, at the end of his life, he says something that stuns and even scares us: “*Everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me*” (2 Tim 1:15).
- There really is no risk or failure in *visionary faith*. Not from God’s perspective. Success in the eyes of our Father and King is simply *fighting* the good fight, even if we do not win every battle. Success is *finishing* the race, even if we do not feel we have won it.
- The real risk of *visionary faith* is not actually failure, but bitterness and disillusionment-- Losing our trust and love for Him because of our “failures.”
- Contrary to the interpretation of most, Romans 8:28 *does not* unconditionally promise that everything will work out for our good. The promise is for “*those who love Him*” even in their difficulties.

A) Disappointment is Godly

Because we are serving God and His purposes, the temptation is to think that that everything we attempt will succeed. But God Himself has a purpose in failure. In fact, God often told His servants ahead of time that they would experience failure in serving Him.

The sovereignty of God over failure is best reflected in the disappointments He Himself has experienced. Early in Genesis we read:

The LORD saw how wicked the humans on Earth had become. Their every thought and desire was only evil all the time. So the LORD was very sad that He had created humans on the Earth, and His heart was filled with pain. (Gen 6:5-6) ¹

OT history is not just the story of the failure of the nation of Israel. Israel was God's nation, His people. In a very real sense, the story of Israel is the story of a painful disappointment of God. Of course it all worked out according to His perfect plan, but do not miss the pain that God Himself has experienced in His effort to use the Israelites in His plan for this world.

God loved Israel and labored for Israel. They were "*His treasured possession*," whom He had chosen to represent Him on Earth and fulfill His purposes (cf. Deut 7:6-8; 2 Sam 7:23; 1 Kgs 8:53). He gave them clear instruction, sent Prophets and leaders to guide them, and protected them from enemies.

But they miserably failed to live up to their calling. Ezekiel 16 is a poignant portrayal of the Israelites' betrayal of God. As you read the following words of God, notice how much He loved them, how much He gave them, and how little they loved Him back and hurt Him. And know that this is precisely what will happen to you as you seek to minister to and with people. It is the probability that people will fail you that is the most painful risk involved in *visionary faith* and it is a comfort to know that God has experienced it too. Listen to Him:

³ *This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem . . .* ⁴ *On the day you were born your umbilical cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths.* ⁵ *No one cared about you or had compassion enough to take care of you. On the day you were born, no one wanted you and you were abandoned in a field and left to die. Then I passed by and saw you struggling in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!"* ⁷ *I made you grow like a plant in the field. You grew up and became the most beautiful of jewels.*

Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of My garment over

you and covered your nakedness. I gave you My solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine. . . .

You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. ¹⁴ And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the honor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD.

But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your love on anyone who passed by and your beauty became theirs. ¹⁶ You took some of your garments to make ugly high places, where you practiced your prostitution. Such things should not happen, nor should they ever occur.

¹⁷ You also took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of My gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them. ¹⁸ And you took your decorated clothes to put on them, and you offered My oil and incense before them. ¹⁹ Also the food I provided for you—the fine flour, olive oil and honey I gave you to eat—you offered as fragrant incense before these idols. That is what happened, declares the Sovereign LORD.

And you took your sons and daughters dedicated to Me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? ²¹ You slaughtered My children and sacrificed them to the idols. ²² In all your detestable practices and your prostitution you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, struggling in your blood. . . .

How weak-willed you are, declares the Sovereign LORD, when you do all these things, acting like a prostitute without shame! You adulterous wife! (Ezek 16:1-32)

When Scripture says that “*love never fails*” (1 Cor 13:8) it does not mean that it always succeeds. Not even God’s love. We will love and sacrifice for people in our *human plans to obey God’s commands* and some of those people may become our worst enemies. Jesus washed the feet of Judas too. Made him a part of His Intimate 12. And Judas betrayed Jesus.

And Paul had his Demas of whom we have written elsewhere:

We are astonished as well by the Gospel preaching, sacrificial ministry, and holy life, that Demas no doubt lived as a close companion of the Apostle Paul. What kind of commitment to Christ would you have to display for someone like the Apostle Paul to refer to you as “*my fellow worker*” with “*Luke*” (Phlm 1:24; cf. Col 4:14). As John MacArthur puts it, Demas was, “one of the apostle’s closest associates.” ² And not for just a few months, but

for years. The Apostle referred to Demas in this way in the late 50's to early 60's.

But in 67-68 A.D., writing to Timothy, Paul says, "*Demas has deserted me because he loved the evil things of this world,*" (2 Tim 4:10). Therefore, there was at least a period of 5-10 years in which Demas labored in the Gospel with Paul. And yet, in the end, abandoned his faith, suggesting he never had the saving kind. The Apostle's description of Demas leaves little doubt that he was not saved, as the Apostle John points out elsewhere that, "*If anyone loves the things of the world, the love of the Father is not in them*" (1 John 2:15).

Notice the Apostle did not even say Demas had deserted Christ, but that he "*deserted me.*" This one hurt. And it was all a part of the territory of living out a calling to please God and fulfill His purposes.

Evidently, David experienced the same. He wrote of someone:

If an enemy were attacking me, I could handle it. If a foe was opposing me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we worshipped together at the house of God. (Ps 55:12-14)

Pursuing a *visionary faith* for God is not safe. We can be sure to encounter the same losses and hurts that these men of God experienced. Indeed, there are some risks to *visionary faith*—and risks that even God wants us to take. Godly men experience a great deal of failure in their lives. Are we willing to? Do we love and trust God enough to risk such things?

B) Faith is More Important than Fruit

It is intriguing to notice Jesus' instruction to His own missionaries:

Jesus told His disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. Therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field. ³ Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. ⁴ Do not take a purse or bag or sandals. . .

. ¹⁰ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Be sure of this: The Kingdom of God is near.' ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. (Luke 10:1-3, 10-12)

Notice several things. First, the need for “workers” in God’s “harvest” is great. Secondly, He gifts, calls, and sends “workers” into His “field.” Thirdly, He does not promise complete safety from all harm, but rather, warns that He is “*sending [them] out like lambs among wolves.*” Fourthly, working for Him requires faith in His provision because they were not to “*take a purse or bag or sandals.*”

But our main point here is that Jesus told them they would experience failure. He specifically told them there would be places that their mission and message would “not” be “welcomed.” Why wouldn’t Jesus simply tell them ahead of time which towns would be successful? Why have the disciples waste the time and energy going to places where their plans would fail? Because Jesus expected them to live within their human limits. Not everything even done for Jesus will produce the success we desire. And, of course, God works even such failures out for His own purposes, in this case, bringing judgment.

But do not miss the fact that Jesus’ own disciples were commanded to travel days on dusty roads to places where they would bear no fruit—as they pursued even Jesus’ plan to fulfill God’s command.

God is indeed pleased with our *human plans to obey His commands*, but He is especially pleased with our faith, not our fruit. The fruit of our endeavors, especially in spiritual matters, depend largely on Him, and we usually have relatively little control of that. But our faith is our decision. What will we trust God for and try for God? This is why He is more pleased with our faith than our fruit.

How many people did Noah save after a hundred years of hard work building a boat by faith? As we noted elsewhere, it is estimated that there were at least 10 billion people living on Earth at the time of the Flood.³ How many did Noah save? Eight. That is not very “successful.”

After being chosen to form a new nation under God, and decades of living by faith, how many sons did Abraham have to continue this new nation God had promised? One. That’s a pretty slow start.

Who served God more sacrificially and exercised more faith for centuries on this planet than the OT Prophets. Yet God’s own commentary on the fruit of their ministry was: “*Even though the LORD has repeatedly sent His servants the Prophets to you Israel, you have not listened or paid any attention*” (Jer 25:4). God even told Ezekiel:

The people I am sending you to are hard-hearted and stubborn. Regardless of whether they listen or not, say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says’. (Ezek 2:4-5)

How would you like to have *that* for your life’s calling? Especially when, in fact, *they did not listen.*

What did Jesus have to show for His ministry at the end of His life? Even after His resurrection? Luke records that in all of Jerusalem, “*the*

believers” who gathered with the Eleven Apostles were “a group numbering about a hundred and twenty” (Acts 1:15). A relatively small church by our American standards.

After all the labor the Apostle Paul invested in the province of Asia, at the end of his life, he says something that stuns and even scares us: “*Everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me*” (2 Tim 1:15). Again, Paul says not only had they abandoned Christ, but “*me*.” This was personal. This hurt. This was his perspective on the earthly fruit of all of his labor in the primary place he had devoted his ministry.

Note that the city of Ephesus was in Asia where the Apostle “*had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus . . . for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord*” (Acts 19:9-10; c. A. D. 51-53). Some 14 years later (c. A. D. 67), as he probably awaited execution in a Roman prison, he says, “*Everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me*” (2 Tim 1:15).

Of course, Paul did not mean this literally. In the very next verse he speaks of the Asian Christian “*Onesiphorus*” who proved to be very loyal to him (cf. vs. 16-18). And even in the later 90’s A. D. we know from Revelation that several churches in Asia, including the one in Ephesus, were still serving Christ. What we have here is, as J. N. D. Kelly put it in his commentary on this statement: “the exaggeration of depression.”⁴

It is a reminder that the great Apostle was merely human. The old man (at least into his sixties) was in prison *again* for simply *pursuing human plans to obey God’s commands*. Evidently there was widespread defections in Asia from both the Apostle and his Gospel. Much of Paul’s life’s work seemed to be a waste. If “*everyone in the province of Asia*” had not literally “deserted” the Apostle, it sure felt like it. And this was the legacy he died with. This was his final commentary on the earthly fruit of much of his life’s work.

It is safe to say that the greatest missionary who ever lived did not end his life with a deep satisfaction of what he had accomplished. No doubt, he had hoped for more. A lot more.

But while “*Everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me*” was Paul’s final commentary on the earthly fruit of his *visionary faith*, he reminds us that it is our *empowering faith* in the sure promises and commands of God that really matter. What we endeavor to do in our *visionary faith* is risky and can even fail. But the objects of *empowering faith* are never risky and never fail. While Paul had to admit at the end of his life that “*Everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me*,” and he realized that “*I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure*” he could also claim:

The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight . . . and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me- the crown

of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of His return. (2 Tim 4:6-8).

In other words, there really is no risk or failure in *visionary faith*. Not from God's perspective. Success in the eyes of our Father and King is simply *fighting* the good fight, even if we do not win every battle. Success is *finishing* the race, even if we do not feel we have won it. God's command is to "*seek first His Kingdom*" (Matt 6:33) on this Earth, but how much of it will be actually realized through your life is in His hands.

The metaphorical Prophet depicted in Isaiah said something similar:

God said to me, "You Israel are My servant and through you I will reveal My glory."

But I replied, "My labor seems useless! I have spent my strength for nothing and to no purpose. But my reward is in the LORD'S hand, and I will trust Him with it." (Isa 49:3-4)

Likewise, we are reminded of the commentary on men of faith in Hebrews:

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things God had promised them. They only saw and welcomed these promises from a distance. (Heb 11:13)

Before you begin your endeavor of *visionary faith*, your *human plans to fulfill God's commands*, you need to have God's definition of success rather than the world's. God is more pleased with faith than fruit.

C) The Real Risk of *Visionary Faith*

The real risk of *visionary faith* is not actually failure, but bitterness and disillusionment. We'll say it again. Just because you are doing something for God doesn't mean you will have the results you want. It certainly doesn't mean it will be easy or without great difficulties. Think again about the many examples spoken of above. But in all of that we can still please God and be successful in His eyes.

So what is real failure in God's sight? Losing our trust and love for Him because of our "failures." In the previous chapter we discussed the failure that Joshua experienced at Ai and the response to it. "*Because of the defeat the people were overwhelmed with fear and lost all their courage*" (Josh 7:5). Even Joshua asks, "*Sovereign LORD, why did You bring us across the Jordan River just to have us destroyed by the Amorites?*" (v. 7).

Do you sense the disillusionment with God, and even the potential bitterness toward God, because of the failure Joshua experienced in his

endeavor to serve God? Joshua is not only questioning God's commands (crossing the Jordan River) but His character and concern. Joshua is even entertaining the idea that God orchestrated the whole thing to "*destroy*" His people rather than deliver and bless them.

Such is the distorting dangers of failure. Through the probable mistakes and failures along the way, our faith in God can turn into a fear of failure. Both we and those following us can become disillusioned about God Himself and His intentions toward us. We think that just because we are doing something for God, we will not experience failure—and certainly not death. But we can—and all as a result of simply trying to love and serve God.

Many men and women have become bitter and disillusioned because they thought they failed in a *visionary faith* to do something for God. Things didn't work out. People even got hurt. *They* got hurt. And the distorted conclusions multiply: "God must not have wanted me to do that." "I must have sinned against God." "I am not good enough for God." "I cannot trust God." "I'd have to admit right now I don't even like God."

How did we get here? Because we loved our vision more than our God. We staked our sense of significance and purpose on being a fruitful servant of God, rather than a chosen son of God. We had the wrong definition of success. We have missed how much we really did please God by just *trying*. We were ignorant or misinformed that nowhere in Scripture did God promise earthly fruit in everything we attempt for Him. And we have forgotten that if we will look at things carefully, not one of His real promises have failed. In fact, the failure may have been designed to produce more humility in our life so that He could even do greater things through us. But if we do not respond to difficulties with faith we may become bitter instead of better. ⁵

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our heavenly Father, we want to be willing to do anything for you no matter what the cost. And we realize that serving You may even cost our life. But saving us cost the life of Your Son, and if losing our life to save others is Your will then we consider it a privilege.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why do we say that God is more pleased with faith than fruit. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 2) What do we say is the real risk of visionary faith? How can it be avoided?
- 3) We claim that the interpretation of Romans 8:28 does not unconditionally promise that everything will work out for our good. Do you agree or disagree and why?

Publications & Particulars

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- ¹ The Hebrew in Genesis 6:5-6 can actually mean that God *repented* of created humankind. Accordingly, most commentators launch into an effort to explain this away in terms of the fact that God never makes mistakes. But some have some helpful comments.

Keil and Delitzsch write:

The repentance of God is an anthropomorphic expression for the pain of the divine love at the sin of man, and signifies that “God is hurt no less by the atrocious sins of men than if they pierced His heart with mortal anguish” (Calvin). (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com, 2000))

Victor Hamilton comments:

God is grieved, even to the point of experiencing *pain in his heart*. . . . It is easy, of course, to dismiss such allusions as anthropopathisms, and to feel that they can tell us nothing about the essential nature of God. But verses like this remind us that the God of the OT is not beyond the capability of feeling pain, chagrin, and remorse. To call him the Impassable Absolute is but part of that truth. *Yahweh regretted [yinnāhem]* that he had made man. this point is made again in v. 7b, “I regret [*emheh*] that I made him.” . . . Here we are introduced the idea of God repenting! As a matter of fact, the Niphal of the root *nhm* occurs 48 times in the OT, and in 34 of these the subject (expressed or implied) is God. (*The Book of Genesis*, NICOT [Eerdmans, 1990], 274

- ² MacArthur, *Commentary*, *in loc*.

- ³ For calculations regarding the Earth’s population at the time of the Flood see section 6.3.A.3 and endnote there.

- ⁴ Gordon Fee comments regarding 2 Timothy 1:15:

It means the defections that the defections in Asia have been so staggering that even his friends from whom he would have expected more—have deserted him.

[A]t least it means that they have abandoned their loyalty to Paul. Is so, then for him that would mean they have also abandoned his gospel, since that is about the only way one could desert the apostle; and that is precisely how the verb is used elsewhere in the PE (4:4; Tit 1:14; a different very is used of the personal “desertions” in 4:10) 236. (*1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* [Hendrickson, 1988], *in loc*.; contra Knight, 383).

⁵ Some might be reminded here of Luke 14:25-35 and include a section here on “counting the cost” of our *visionary faith*. However, it is best to interpret this passage as Jesus challenging the “large crowds” (v. 25) to a commitment of *saving faith*, not *visionary faith*. A “disciple” throughout Jesus’ teachings is a committed follower in covenant with Him (cf. “Disciple,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel Green, Scot McKnight eds. [Intervarsity, 1992]).

Additionally, it could be said that actually counting the full cost of a *visionary faith* is rather impossible. We cannot know the future. We do not know what our endeavor for God will cost. And this is probably a good thing.

Chapter 6

The Requirements of Visionary Faith I

Hard Work & Holiness

Table of Topics

A) Our Hard Work

A.1) The Balance of *Visionary Faith: God & us*

A.2) The Hard Work of *Visionary Faith*

A.3) The Suffering of *Visionary Faith*

A.4) The Example of Jesus

A.5) The Reward of Hard Work

B) Our Holiness

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- God requires that we work for our vision to be realized.
- God will not do for us what He has already enabled us to do.
- The laborers in Kingdom work are always relatively few, but that does not mean the Master will lower His standards. Being used by God requires holiness.
- How much hard work was required for Noah to build the ark?
- God-glorifying pursuits often require suffering.
- Our ultimate example of hard work and suffering to accomplish something for God is, of course, our King.
- God is more interested in our purity than our plans.

A) The Requirement of Hard Work

A.1) The Balance of *Visionary Faith*: God & us

Because of the return of Christ, we always pray that God will think you have lived up to His commanding invitation to experience your special privilege and responsibility as a Christian.

We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every work prompted by your faith.

Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of you, and you will be honored along with Him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 1:11-12)

On behalf of the Thessalonians, Paul was praying that God would not only “*accomplish any passionate resolve to do good*” but also bless “*every work prompted by your faith*” (2 Thess 2:11). Do not miss the implication here: *our “works of faith” are required to “accomplish any passionate resolve to do good” and have “the name of our Lord Jesus . . . honored.”*

It is one thing to have desires and dreams, even good, God-glorifying ones. But God requires that we work for them in order to see them realized. He is willing and even eager to do what only He can do, but He will not do for us what He has already enabled us to do. That is how we know what God is expecting of us in our pursuit to see Him glorified. If He has enabled us, and given the opportunity to do something, then He expects us to do it. Or we can say it like this: “Do your best, and trust God with the rest.”

For example, both Paul and Jesus make it clear that *praying* for our desires is required to see them accomplished. Is that something we are able to do? Of course. Is that something God is going to do for us? Of course not. Likewise, there are “works of faith” we must choose and do in order to see the object of that faith realized.

Throughout the whole passage of 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 Paul describes an intimate interplay between the works of God and our works, all being necessary to “*accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every work prompted by your faith.*” Jesus put it this way elsewhere:

Keep asking and you will receive, keep seeking and you will find, and keep knocking and the door will be opened (Matt 7:7-8)

Do you see the balance between what God promises to do and what He expects us to do? We need to “*keep asking*” and “*keep seeking*” for opportunities to accomplish our vision, and “*knock*” on those opportunities when they come. And as we do, our request will be granted and our seeking and knocking will be successful.

A.2) The Hard Work of Visionary Faith

Paul says our part in seeing our *visionary faith* accomplished and God glorified is “*work prompted by your faith.*” Indeed, faith in God is necessary. If you don’t trust God you will not try anything. But we need to work as well, and work hard.

Elsewhere, the Apostle describes the pursuit of his *visionary faith* for God as a race in the ancient Olympic games:

Do you not realize that in a race all the runners run, but only one of them gets the prize? So run to win! Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. But they do this merely to get a crown that will not last. But we discipline ourselves to get a crown that will last forever.

Therefore I do not run aimlessly. I do not fight like a man uselessly beating the air. On the contrary, I discipline my body and make it obey me so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for my reward. (1 Cor 9:24-27)

What was required for Paul to “*live up to [his] commanding invitation to experience [his] special privilege and responsibility as a Christian*” and to “*accomplish [his] passionate resolve to do good, and every work prompted by [his] faith*” in order that “*the name of our Lord Jesus be honored*” (2 Thess 1:11)? What will it require from us? We need to “*run*” harder than others, subject ourselves to “*strict training*,” to not work “*aimlessly*” like so many do, and finally, “*discipline [our] body and make it obey*” us so that we will not fail in our mission and therefore “*be disqualified for [our] reward.*”

What vision for God did not require work, and even really hard and long work? How much time and effort did it require from Noah to build a triple-decker boat one and a half football fields long and wide without modern equipment (cf. Gen 6:15-16)? How much work did Moses’ calling of leading hundreds of thousands of people out of Egypt and in the desert for 40 years? It is because Noah and Moses were great men of faith, that they also worked really, really hard and long in their service to God.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul referred to their “*work produced by faith*” and “*labor prompted by love*” (1 Thess 1:3). The

word he used for “*labor [kopos]*”: “Denotes an arduous, wearying kind of toil, done to the point of exhaustion. . . . It is an effort that strains all of one’s energies to the maximum level.”¹

A.3) The Suffering of Visionary Faith

But it is not only really hard and long work that will be required. God-glorifying, Kingdom-building, devil-defeating pursuits often require suffering. At least the Apostle Paul was warned when he received his vision of how he would serve and glorify God:

The Lord said to Ananias, “Go tell Saul that he is My chosen instrument to represent Me before the Gentiles and their kings and the Jews. I will show him how much he must suffer to represent Me.” (Acts 9:15-16)²

And suffer he did. About 20 years after his commission, he wrote:

What anyone else dares to boast about . . . I also dare to boast about. . . . I have worked much harder, been in prison more often, been whipped more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.

²⁴ *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,*

²⁶ *I have been constantly moving. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from thieves, in danger from the Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false Christians.*

²⁷ *I have labored and worked really hard and have often been without sleep; I have experienced hunger and thirst and have often had no food. I have been cold and naked.*

²⁸ *In addition to all of this, everyday I carry the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is spiritually weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?* (2 Cor 11:21, 23-29)

That is what a vision to do something for God might cost you. Why did all of this happen to Paul? Because he was a bad guy? Because he made foolish decisions? Because he was just really unlucky? No, the reason for all that suffering was one thing: Paul’s decision and determination to do something great for God. Along these lines, John Ortberg writes: “Everyone in Scripture who said yes to their calling had to pay a high price. So will you and I.”³

A.4) The Example of Jesus

Our ultimate example of hard work and suffering to accomplish something for God is, of course, our King. What did His calling on Earth to glorify God require of Him?

First, a lot of hard work. He said even on a Sabbath day, *“My Father is always working, and so am I”* (John 5:17). It is no wonder that our Savior was once described as *“tired”* just from a *“journey”* (John 4:6), and elsewhere fell into a deep sleep, propped up in a wooden boat, during *“a furious storm”* (Matt 8:24). And at the end of His life He could say to His Father, *“I have glorified You on Earth by completing the work You gave Me to do”* (John 17:4).

Jesus certainly suffered and sacrificed to accomplish His God-given task on Earth. When *“A teacher of the Old Testament Law came to Him and said, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go’”* (Matt 8:19), Jesus warned him what kind of sacrifice, even poverty, that might require when He replied, *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head”* (v. 20). We are not surprised that when they crucified the Lord, apparently His only belongings were literally the clothes on His back. . . . and they took even these.

Of course, the fulfillment of Christ’s mission for God ultimately cost Him death. Are we willing to work excruciatingly hard and long, suffer often, and even literally die to accomplish our vision?

B) The Requirement of Holiness

In a previous chapter, we discussed the defeat of Joshua and the Israelites at Ai (cf. Josh 7-8). We made the point that neither Joshua, the spies, nor the soldiers who died had done anything wrong. However, we read

The Israelites were not faithful regarding the war spoils devoted to God. Achan son of Carmi . . . took some of them. So the LORD’S anger burned against Israel. . . . The LORD said to Joshua . . . Israel has sinned; they have violated My covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied. . . . That is why the Israelites are defeated by their enemies. . . . I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction. (Josh 7:1, 10-12)

While it was only Achan who had sinned, this is a reminder that God is more interested in our purity than our plans. He is more concerned

to form the character of Christ in us than to advance the Kingdom of Christ through us. The laborers in Kingdom work are always relatively few, but that does not mean the Master will lower His standards. Being used by God requires holiness.

The Apostle Paul reminded Timothy of this very thing:

In a large wealthy home there are not only utensils made of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are for honorable uses. The others are for dishonorable uses. If you keep yourself pure, you will be used for honorable purposes, set apart to be useful for the Master, and prepared to do every good work.

So flee from the evil desires of youth. Pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love, and peace along with those who call on the Lord with pure hearts. (2 Tim 2:20-22)

The Church will always have wheat and weeds mixed (cf. Matt 13:24-30). Yet in this warning and exhortation is a tremendous promise: If we will refuse to be teamed up with unholy people in ministry and “*flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faithfulness, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure hearts,*” then we “*will be used for honorable purposes, set apart to be useful for the Master, and prepared to do every good work.*” Note however the warning if we do not pursue holiness with holy people. We will not be “*useful for the Master.*”

God is very reluctant to bless servants who are not holy for several reasons. First, “success” for a sinner deceives the person into thinking that their sin is either small or acceptable to God. Secondly, setting up such people as leaders and examples in the Church distorts true Christianity and will disillusion people. Third, such a person has great vulnerabilities from the evil one. Their armor has holes in it that the enemy will surely take advantage of them and embarrass the Christian faith.

Why then have we seen unholy ministers have “successful” ministries? First, God is gracious, and He can choose to use dirty vessels to do His work. We just should never count on such rare exceptions. Secondly, one will notice that many ministries of sinful ministers produce much false fruit, and consist of false believers simply following a popular and prosperous leader. Big churches and big budgets *do not* mean God is blessing. Any charismatic businessman in America can produce the same results without God. The Mormons are producing all kinds of religious fruit with a false gospel.

The Apostle wrote:

Do you not realize that in a race all the runners run, but only one of them gets the prize? So run to win! Everyone who

competes in the games goes into strict training. But they do this merely to get a crown that will not last. But we discipline ourselves to get a crown that will last forever.

Therefore I do not run aimlessly. I do not fight like a man uselessly beating the air. On the contrary, I discipline my body and make it obey me so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for my reward (1 Cor 9:24-27)

It was not a loss of salvation that Paul was concerned about. It was forfeiting a God-blessed ministry in this life, and rewards for it in the next life. Such prizes are worth beating and subduing our sinful nature for. If we do not, the Apostle warns we are losers in a very real way.

Perhaps the most dangerous threat against a man's prospects to be used by God is pornography. It is sin. Gross sin. It trains you to lack the self-control that a leader so desperately needs. And it rightfully brings shame, guilt, and a lack of confidence in your life. "*The adulteress preys upon your very life*" (Prov 6:26), both the physical and virtual kind of prostitute.

"Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng" (Prov 7:26). Do not let yourself be one of them and forfeit your opportunity and potential to be used by God. He is watching, as is the devil, and pornography is not the secret sin you think it is. And when God sees it in your life, do not be surprised if He rejects your desires, and refuses to bless your *visionary faith*.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Father, we thank You that you are willing to help us meet all the requirements of visionary faith. Please teach us and enable us to be hard working, humble, and holy. Not only to be fruitful and pleasing for You, but to be a blessing to others.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) We suggest God will not do for us what He has already enabled us to do. What would be some practical examples of this?
- 2) What are biblical examples of working hard?

- 3) Why do God-glorifying pursuits often require suffering?
- 4) Why is holiness a vital requirement to be greatly used of God?

Pastoral Perspectives

- Your compelling, challenging, clear vision for your church will empower the hard work necessary for its completion. Dr. Malphurs writes:

Ministry can be very difficult, even painful. Discouragement and disappointment often lurk in the ministry hallways and board rooms of the typical church. It is not beyond the enemy to incite persecution against Christ's church (Acts 8:1). Spiritual warfare comes with the ministry territory (Eph. 6:10-18). Many have risked or given their lives for the savior and the furtherance of the gospel.

What has sustained Christians from the beginning of the church in the book of Acts up to today? One answer is a biblical, compelling vision. It encourages people to look beyond the mundane and the pain of ministry. It keeps a picture of front of them that distracts from what is and announces what could be. ⁴

- Are there any habitual sins operating in your life? Decide now to die to them, to love God more than their promise of pleasure, and to love what you want to do for God more than the sin. Stop the sin before it is too late and God does not deem you worthy of serving Him in truly glorifying ways.

Publications & Particulars

¹ John MacArthur, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Parsons Technology, 1997), 1 Thess 1:3.

² "*Represent Me*" trans. Eng. "bear My name."

³ Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat* (Zondervan, 2001), 71.

⁴ Malphurs, 148.

Chapter 7

The Requirements of Visionary Faith II

Humility

Table of Topics

- A) The Importance of Humility
- B) The Meaning of humility: *living according to an accurate understanding of who we are in relation to God*
- C) How God Humbles Us: *the wilderness*
 - C.1) Wildernesses in Scripture
 - C.2) My personal wilderness
- D) How We Humble Ourselves: *serving people & prayer*
- E) The Promise of Humility: *exaltation*

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Humility is living according to an accurate understanding of who we are in relation to God.
- Humility is understanding that we are the most exalted and blessed people on Earth *because of what God has done for us*.
- In order for God to be glorified in your life before people, *you* need to be glorified before people. This requires humility.
- All of the humble & fruitful men in Scripture seem to have one thing in common: They spent time in a wilderness.
- What leaders in Scripture *did not* spend time in deserts? Guys like Saul, Samson, and all of the Israelite kings except David. And they were all great embarrassments to God.
- One of the primary obstacles to successful ministry is that we have not failed enough.
- It is not our seminaries, studies, and successes that provide the kind of deserts that humble a man. It is the deserts of life.
- Like love, our humility toward God is never greater than our humility toward people.
- We must be faithful in the responsibilities we have now, if we are to expect God to give us more responsibility.

A) The Importance of Humility

When something is repeated in the Bible three times, we should take notice. This is certainly the case with the statement: *“God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble”* (1 Pet 5:5; cf. Prov 3:24; Jms 4:6). God’s grace is what we vitally need to see our *visionary faith* fulfilled. And God only promises it to the humble. While we have discussed the need for hard work and holiness, perhaps the reason we devote more space to humility is that if you have it, the others will probably follow.

Humility is especially important if we desire to glorify God. Our central text tells us that the reason for pursuing a *visionary faith* is:

Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of you, and you will be honored along with Him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess 1:12).

Do you see that God wants to glorify you? Why? Because in order for God to be glorified in your life before people, *you* need to be glorified before people. Any great man who brought earthly glory to God, was highly revered and exalted by people around them. When God blesses us, when He uses us, we are glorified. And it is at this point that we have the opportunity to publicly glorify God.

But the text says, *“all made possible because of the grace of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ”*. It is by God’s grace that we will glorify Him. And yet in the process of glorifying God we can become proud because people are looking up to us. And our pride will hinder God’s grace to be glorified because He is opposed to the proud. As we endeavor to glorify God we must remain humble so that we have the grace to glorify God.

Back to an earlier point. If we are to glorify God publicly, then we will be glorified publicly. Accordingly, at the beginning of Joshua’s ministry of leadership we read: *“The LORD said to Joshua, ‘Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they will know that I am with you as I was with Moses’”* (Josh 3:7). Again, there is some amount of unavoidable glorification of God’s leaders if they are to glorify Him and have the trust and respect of the people. However, even though Joshua was exalted by God to even the level of Moses, we never sense in the biblical record that he ever became proud about it.

Unfortunately, too many glorified ministers of God forget *“We now have this light of knowing Jesus Christ shining in our hearts, but we are like clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves”* (2 Cor 4:7).

When we remember that God said, *“I am the LORD; that is My name! I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols”* (Isa

42:8), we can understand His reluctance to fulfill our *visionary faith* if it will simply make us proud. On the other hand, God is willing to glorify us in order to glorify Him. He is not willing to give anyone *His* glory, but there is a glory that belongs to us, and we may even need in order to fulfill a ministry that would glorify Him. Joshua needed to be glorified in the eyes to the people in order for him to lead them.

If we are humble, our cry can be that of Christ Himself Who prayed while on Earth: *“Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that your Son will glorify You”* (John 17:1). He was referring to the cross, not to fame, but hopefully *“the time [will] come”* in our own lives for God to glorify us that we may glorify Him.¹

B) The Meaning of Humility: living according to an accurate understanding of who we are in relation to God

There is a great deal of confusion in the Church regarding what humility is. Humility is simply living according to an accurate understanding of who we are in relation to God. On one hand, we are *“God’s chosen, holy, and dearly loved people”* (Col 3:12). God *“has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ”* (Eph 1:3), and we, *“have been made completely full through Christ”* (Col 2:10). We are the most honored, exalted, important, and cherished people on Earth. Not in the eyes of mere people, but according to the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the Universe.

Not only do we possess a lofty position, but a great power. Accordingly, the Apostle prayed, *“All glory to God, Who is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ask or imagine through the power at work in us. Glory to the Father in the Church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen”* (Eph 3:20). Indeed, the glory belongs to Him, but “the power” is “in us” through which we are now *“able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ask or imagine.”* That is a lot of power. It’s from God, but is still ours.

In other words, no mere human being could ascend to more greatness than the greatness we have been given. Accordingly, Webster’s definition of humble as “insignificant” is an inadequate but too popular understanding of humility. In other words, thinking too little of ourselves is not humility.

On the other hand, the Apostle writes: *“Do not be conceited. Instead, reasonably evaluate yourself”* (Rom 12:3). Arrogance, for sure, is the antithesis of humility.

What then is the balance? Humility is believing that we are the most exalted and blessed people on Earth *because of what God has done for*

us. It is “self-made” men who think they have reason to be proud. No right thinking Christian leader will ever believe that his salvation, relationships, possessions, gifts, and ministry are his own doing. We *know* all of this is from God. But we also know all of this is *great*. God has made us great. That is the foundational conviction of humility. And we miss humility if we do not understand how great He has made us, or that it is He Who has made us so great.

The theology of humility is clearly taught by Christ when on one hand He says, “*Without Me you are not able to do anything*” (John 15:5). Without the power, grace, and blessing of Christ we can do nothing that is good or worthwhile in the sight of God which is the only opinion that will ever matter.

But on the other hand, Jesus said, “*If you continue to live in Me and I continue to live in you then you will produce much spiritual fruit . . . My Father is glorified when you produce much spiritual fruit and it proves you are My followers . . . I chose you and appointed you to go and produce spiritual fruit that will last*” (John 15:5, 8, 16).

Humility does not mean that we do only a little with our life because we are weak people. Humility means we “*produce much spiritual fruit*” so the “*Father is glorified*” because we are connected to and empowered by Jesus.

An even more succinct statement reflecting the essence of humility is Paul’s claim, “*I can do anything through Christ who strengthens me*” (Phil 4:13). The Apostle is not shy or doubtful about who He is. He says, with less exaggeration than many might think, “*I can do anything.*” But he knows full well that kind of strength must come from Christ.

Humility then is an *honest* recognition of our very great position and power, with an *honoring* recognition of Who gave us these things.

C) How God Humbles Us: *the wilderness*

C.1) Wildernesses in Scripture

All of the humble and fruitful men in Scripture seem to have one thing in common: They spent time in a wilderness.

This is obviously true of Moses. We meet him as a young man in the following text:

One day after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them doing their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing around and seeing that no one was watching, Moses killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (Exod 2:11-12)

Moses had a burden. A good burden. He was greatly concerned about “*his own people*.” God’s people. He wanted to help. But the pride we discussed above caused him to take matters into his own hands, and he ended up failing miserably. Surely he thought he could use his high position and great power in the royal family to help the Hebrews. But God needed to teach Moses that God’s grace upon a humble man is a lot more powerful than any earthly position. And teach him He did.

Moses fled from Egyptian royalty to Midian, where he described himself as “*a foreigner in a foreign land*” (Exod 2:22). After 40 years of shepherding sheep (cf. Acts 7:30), we find him at “*the far side of the wilderness [midbar]*” (Exod 3:1). The Hebrew word *midbar* is derived from *dābar* which means “to speak.”² We are not surprised then that it was “*there*” in the *midbar* that “*the Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses*” and God first spoke to him (v. 2). And it is through our own deserts and wildernesses of life, our *midbar* experiences, that God “speaks” to us in life changing ways. Is it perhaps because such places make us more sensitive to, and thirsty for, God’s word?

It was here, on the back side of the desert, that Moses was ready to lead God’s people. But even after he became a leader his ministry was in a desert for another 40 years (cf. Acts 7:36). It was during this time that we read: “*Moses was a very humble man. He was more humble than anyone else on the face of the Earth*” (Num 12:3). Could that be because he spent 80 years living in deserts?

Who else is described in Scripture as spending considerable time in the wilderness before serving God in great ways? Moses’ successor Joshua shared 40 years in the desert with Moses.

Likewise, for much of his twenty’s, “*David stayed in the desert [midbar] strongholds and in the hills of the Desert [midbar] of Ziph*” where “*Day after day Saul searched for him*” to kill him (1 Sam 23:14).

John the Baptist, “*lived in the desert until he appeared publicly to Israel*” (Luke 1:80).

Likewise, after His baptism and before His public ministry, “*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days He was tempted by the devil*” (Luke 4:1-2).

The Apostle Paul seems to have spent some time in seclusion in the wilderness as well, rather soon after his conversion. He writes in Galatians:

When God . . . was pleased to reveal His Son in me . . . I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were Apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia.
(1:15-17)

Obviously, “*Arabia*” was a vast land, but it was definitely known for its deserts as it is today. Our claim that the Apostle lived for some time in seclusion and isolation here is supported by the fact that 1) He implies this is where He received his revelation of the Gospel from Jesus, and not from any person, and 2) it was a death threat by the Jews and threat of capture by the governor of Damascus that drove him into “*Arabia*” (cf. Acts 9:23-25; 2 Cor 11:32-33). Both of these facts suggest that he experienced some seclusion during the time spent in “*Arabia*.”³

Why did all of these great servants of God spend time in deserts? The same reason the whole Israelite nation spent forty years in the desert. God explained:

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert [midbar] these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you. . . .

He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you.

You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is He Who gives you the ability to produce wealth. (Deut 8:2-18)

What is it about deserts that is so good for preparing a person to be used by God? They are humbling places. They are quiet places. They are lonely places. God leads us into deserts, (whether they be the physical, circumstantial, or spiritual kind), to “*humble you and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you*” (Deut 8:16).

God leads us into deserts “*to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*” (v. 3). Difficult, painful places teach us to depend on God because we have no other choice. They teach us to trust God because He comes through (v. 4, “*Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years*”).

Deserts “*discipline*” (v. 5) us, purifying our ego. They prepare us for the blessing and glory that may be necessary to fulfill our ministry for

Him, because otherwise we will not be able to handle it. Physical deserts bring us to the end of civilization. Spiritual deserts bring us to the end of ourselves. Which is where we must be before it is safe for God to bless us.

Otherwise when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (vs. 12-14)

Without experiencing God in tremendous difficulties, you will be especially tempted to “say to yourself, *“My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me”* (v. 17).

The kinds of deserts that God may lead us into and through can be pretty scary, a “*vast and dreadful desert . . . thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions*” (v. 15). But it is only in places like that, that you see God provide “*you water out of hard rock*” and “*manna to eat in the desert,*” giving you the kind of undeniable evidence you need to build your faith in God. After the desert, you are not limited to reading the Scriptures to know that you can trust God—you know it from personal experience.

Which prompts the question: What leaders in Scripture *did not* spend time in deserts? Guys like Saul, Samson, and all of the Israelite kings except David. And what did they generally do with the power, glory, and ministries God gave them? Serve and glorify God? No- they were all great embarrassments to God, just like too many Church leaders today. And perhaps it is because they never spent time in a wilderness. Have you?

The author was talking with a man in his younger thirties who expressed his desire to be in ministry. He was asked to describe the times he had failed in his life. After some thought he replied he couldn’t think of any. I replied he probably hadn’t failed enough to be in ministry. A lack of failure is one of the primary obstacles to successful ministry, because without it, we probably will not be humble enough. And we may have a difficult time empathizing with those who are hurting and need grace. But not if we have “been there” and experienced the same pain, doubts, anger and grace.

It is not our seminaries, studies, and successes that provide the kind of deserts that humble a man, make him learn dependence on God, teach him to trust God, and convince him who God is and who he is in relation to God. It is the wildernesses of life. And a man who has responded correctly in such deserts in his life is miles ahead of others as an instrument for God’s purposes.

Age itself can have a way of humbling us. Imagine the difference between the perspectives of an aged, successful, and spiritually mature Pastor compared to a young one who is just starting out. The young Pastor is apt to think he needs to prove something, both to himself and others. His “vision” is probably to accomplish something that will mean personal success for him. He may work at a frantic pace, prioritizing tasks over relationships. The young man is greatly tempted to have his identity and sense of self-worth tied up in the observable fruit of his ministry. There will be far too much focus on himself.

Not the old Pastor. He looks back on his life with a great sense of satisfaction as he sees all that God did for him and through him. At the beginning of his ministry career, he would not have imagined how good God would be to him. He knows he has nothing to prove to anyone. He has done his best and God did the rest. He knows that relationships are far more important than tasks, and it is those friendships that he cherishes much more than anything he accomplished. He would be content to simply retire and go golfing and fishing if God gave him permission to do so. But his conscience won’t let him. He has too much to offer others. What excites him the most is offering himself to make *others* successful. He already feels successful beyond what he had ever hoped for.

How wonderful it would be if a young Pastor would believe what the old Pastor believes, being convinced of their Christ-centered sense of security and significance. These are the kinds of ministers that the Apostle Peter was encouraging when he wrote them:

Now a word to you who are Elders in the churches. I am also an Elder and even a personal witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I will also share in the glory that will be revealed. I appeal to you: Shepherd the flock of people God has entrusted to you. Accept responsibility for their care. Do this not because you have to, but because you want to, as God wants. Do not Pastor because you are greedy for money but because you are eager to serve. Do not make people submit to you as their master, but lead them by your example. (1 Pet 5:1-3) ⁴

Young men might serve they feel they “*have to*” for the sake of their own sense of significance. On the other hand, mature ministers understand the incredibly high responsibility and privilege it is to “*Shepherd the flock of people God has entrusted to you.*” But because of their humility, they “*Do not make people submit to [them] as their master, but lead them by [their] example.*” Their flock is not a means to accomplish personal greatness, but a people they are “*eager to serve.*” Such ministers are not driven to be a Shepherd by greed or any other

selfish ambition to make themselves secure and significant, but they desire to if God has made it clear He wants them in that role.

C.2) My Personal Wilderness

May I briefly describe a personal wilderness I experienced? I graduated from college in 1989, married a wonderful woman, and was eager to serve God. I wanted to go into campus ministry but had to raise my financial support. The problem was that I didn't know very many Christians with money. After 14 months of extremely hard and difficult work, asking strangers for money, I finally found enough people to financially support me and my family and entered into full time ministry. And then over the next six months saw very little fruit. After sharing the Gospel several days a week over these months I can only remember one Chinese kid who prayed with me, and then I lost his contact information and never saw him again.

By that time, a significant number of my original supporters were ending their two year commitment to me and I needed to go back to support raising. I couldn't. It just wasn't in me. I resigned.

Having a business degree, I set out to find a job. I didn't find any. I settled for working at a mylar balloon distribution company filling orders. I was soon fired because I made too many mistakes. My next job was selling advertising for a Christian radio station. I lasted longer, but didn't make any money. My next job was selling hot tubs for a place called *Whirling Waters*. It wasn't long before one day the owner threatened to fire me because I couldn't get the chemicals in the hot tubs right.

Shortly after this I remember going to a church and praying, "God, if you let me lose this job, I don't know how I can trust you." The very next morning I was fired.

I remember getting home late one night during that time and walking into my daughter Joelle's bedroom, and watching her sleep in her crib. And I remember seriously wondering if I was going to be able to provide for her. My confidence in both God and myself was gone.

The best "vision" I could muster for my life was to be a manager in a grocery store. Working in one had been my favorite job in high school. I figured I could reach out to young people there since it didn't look like I was going to have any other kind of ministry. Many times I travelled an hour to visit a particular grocery company that had a training program, asking them to accept me. I thought persistence would pay off. It never did. They kept saying "no."

My spirit was as low as it had ever been in my life. I spent a lot of time crying out to God. I became rather convinced that this was about

all God had for me. He had put me on the shelf. I wondered, what had I done wrong? Was this punishment for resigning from the campus ministry and not doing the hard work of raising more support?

The one verse I hung on to was 1 Peter 5:10: “*After you have suffered for a short time, God Himself will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation.*” I just didn’t know how long “a short time” would be. For me it was about 9 months. Three jobs, three failures, and a whole bunch of “no’s” in 9 months. It felt like 9 years.

Then one day I was talking with a business man I had met during my Christian radio advertising job. He mentioned that he had just returned from a seminar where he was informed that the government was radically increasing fines for safety violations. He thought it would make a great business if someone could learn the regulations and help businesses comply with them.

Only because I did not think I had any other options, I gave it a try. I studied thick, obscure government manuals for many, many hours. Overtime I developed some services. I approached a small building contractor and told him what I was doing. He asked, “What would you charge for that?” Having no idea, I did the smart thing and asked, “What would you pay for it?” I don’t remember what he said, but it was about three times as much as I was going to ask for.

It took me about 3 months to service that first client. I still had to develop several things I had sold him. But 6 months later I was servicing about three clients a week, making about \$200 an hour. I remember the first time I made \$10,000 in one month. I remember it because the previous year I had made only \$11,000 the whole year. Over 70% of the businesses I approached with my services purchased them, even though I continued to increase my prices. I had no competition.

About 9 months after being fired from *Whirling Waters* and reaching my low point, one of the largest cereal companies in the world hired me. After servicing one of their plants they were so pleased that they wanted to have me service several of their plants. s

About the same time, the grocery store company I had tried so desperately to be hired by, purchased my services. About 7 years after being fired at the balloon distribution company, the owner offered me a large sum of money to franchise my company. And there was no doubt in my mind that this was all from God.

D) How We Humble Ourselves: serving people & prayer

As described above, certainly God uses circumstances to humble us. But even in those circumstances we must choose to humble ourselves.

Otherwise those same events will hurt us instead of humble us. Humility is a choice. Accordingly the Apostle Peter writes:

Young men, respect the authority of the elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another. This is because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." So humble yourselves under God's caring power so that He will exalt you at the right time. (1 Pet 5:5-6) ⁵

"Respect the authority of the elders . . . clothe yourselves with humility . . . humble yourselves." Humility is a choice.

How do we know if we are being humble? Peter equates humility before God with humility before people. To *"humble yourselves under God's caring power"* is to *"respect the authority of the elders,"* and to *"clothe yourselves with humility toward one another."* Like love, our humility toward God is never greater than our humility toward people. Our humility with people we can see, is how we are humble toward the God we cannot see.

There is one primary way that we exercise such humility with people: we serve them. Jesus spoke of this kind of humble leadership when He taught:

"You know that the rulers of the pagans make themselves masters over their people and those in high positions use their authority over them. Do not be like this among you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. This is just like the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve others and to give His life as a ransom for many." (Matt 20:25-28)

Jesus is not opposed to *"whoever wants to become great."* Greatness and significance is, in fact, a central God-given need in humans. ⁶ But He greatly desires to redefine greatness and what will truly fulfill us. It is being a *"servant,"* a *"slave,"* not being *"served"* but to *"serve others,"* even to *"give"* your *"life"* for them. When you are joyfully living like a slave to people, you know you are humble. *Humble* greatness may seem to many a contradiction, but it is the biblical definition of success.

Related to serving is the fact that faithfulness to our responsibilities exhibits humility. There is a divine principle at work in our lives that cannot be ignored. Jesus said, *"The one who is faithful in something very insignificant, will also be faithful with something of great importance. And the one who is dishonest in a very little thing will be dishonest in great things"* (Luke 16:10). ⁷

When we are focused and energized on doing *"great"* things for God in the future, we are tempted to neglect and diminish the *"insignificant"*

things in our life now. God wants to grow us in being able to take on more responsibility. But He will require us to be faithful in the responsibilities we have now. These will include our marriage, our children, our friends, our church, our job, our finances, and our time.

If we are not doing all that God would have us to in these realms of life, we cannot expect God to give us ministry beyond them. It is, in fact, our exceptional example in these very things that will be an essential foundation for whatever ministry you do for God.

David communicated this same principle with a promise when he wrote: *“Trust in the LORD and do good. Dwell in the land and practice faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD; and He will give you the desires of your heart.”* (Ps 37:3-4). As you *“do good”* where God has put you, and *“practice faithfulness”* in your responsibilities and experience a *“delight”* in your friendship with God, *“He will give you the desires of your heart.”* This is because your *“delight”* in God will make your *“desires”* His desires, and your faithfulness in your current situation will prepare you to handle more blessing.

Another vital way that we humble ourselves and therefore receive supernatural grace is prayer. In prayer we are admitting to ourselves, God, and others that we are attempting something beyond ourselves and that we need God. Proud men do not pray. Humble men do. A lot.

The Apostle Peter notes another area of humility that might be missed. He writes: *“Humble yourselves under God’s caring power, so that He exalt you at the right time. Throw all your cares on God because He cares about you”* (1 Pet 5:6-7). Trusting God with our worries is a demonstration of humility toward Him. When we are worried it is because we are trusting and depending on ourselves too much. Along these lines, C. J. Mahaney writes:

The apostle Peter clearly and practically describes for us how we can humble ourselves daily in 1 Peter 5:6–7. . . . When we humble ourselves each morning by casting all our cares on the Lord, we will start the day free of care. The humble are genuinely care free. I’ve discovered how true that is about myself and my soul. Where there’s worry, where there’s anxiousness, pride is at the root of it. When I am experiencing anxiety, the root issue is that I’m trying to be self-sufficient. I’m acting independent of God.⁸

Finally, getting counsel on decisions from your spouse, fellow leaders, and others is an important sign of humility and should be a habit. *“A fool thinks his own way is right, but a wise man listens to advice”* (Proverbs 12:15).

E) The Promise of Humility: exaltation

Above, we noted the tremendous humility of Christ described in an ancient Christian song recorded in Philippians. However, we did not quote the whole song. The complete lyrics are as follows:

Jesus Christ existed in the form of God and did not think that equality with God was something to be grasped. Instead He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming the likeness of humans, and appearing as a man. He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name. This is so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow of those who are in Heaven and on the Earth and under the Earth and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:6-11)

This is the story of Christ. From humility to glory. God wants this to be our story as well. To humble ourselves now in this life on Earth, standing on the position and using the power God gave us, to serve others, so that God may exalt us, perhaps in this life, but more importantly, in the next eternal one.

Not surprisingly, Jesus said, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt 23:12). This is because a man who has humbled himself is ready for exaltation because we will desire it only as it serves to give him more ability and opportunity to glorify God and serve people.

Along the same lines Peter wrote: “Humble yourselves under God’s caring power so that He will exalt you at the right time. ” (1 Pet 5:6). Here again is a promise of divine blessing and even exaltation. Only God knows when the “right time” will occur, and so we must trust Him with that. But the requirement of divine exaltation is that we humble ourselves.

Extras & Endnotes

Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, help us to be humble. Goodness, if God the Son can humble Himself, why can’t we? We commit to following in His path and humbling ourselves before people and God so we may bring You the most glory. Amen

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What is our definition of humility? Would you add to this in some way?
- 2) Why do we claim that our *visionary faith* may require us to be glorified?
- 3) What is one common experience of many of the men God greatly used in Scripture? What is God trying to tell us? Have you experienced this, and what did you learn from it?
- 4) Why do we claim that one of the primary obstacles to successful ministry is that we have not failed enough?
- 5) What is the primary way that we demonstrate humility?
- 6) Why is our humility toward God never greater than our humility toward people?
- 7) What are additional habits of humility?

Pastoral Perspectives

- What spiritual authority has God placed in your life? How could you be more humble and supportive of it in order to demonstrate to God your humility and ability to be a leader yourself?
- What God-given responsibilities do you need to be more faithful with so that God can trust you with more?
- Have you had a wilderness experience? Journal it. Describe it. Remember it. Then meditate on it and record the lessons you learned from it, both about yourself and God.

Publications & Particulars

¹C. J. Mahaney reflects what we believe is a popular but unbiblical notion when he writes in his book *Humility: True Greatness*: “We’re to ascribe glory to no man. Glory is ascribed exclusively and entirely to God. . . . Therefore, only God should receive glory.” (Random House, 2008, Kindle Edition, 752-753). Again, God wants to give us the glory we deserve, and may even need to fulfill our ministry, and such glory will glorify God.

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- ² The derivation of *midbar* (wilderness) from *dābar* (speak) is confirmed by the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, Bruce K. Waltke, eds. (Moody, 1980), 178. *Midbar* is even translated once as “mouth” (Song 4:3).
- ³ Dr. MacArthur comments, “The place and purpose of his sojourn in Arabia are unknown, but that was surely the place of his preparation for ministry.” (*Commentary*, Gal 1:15-17)
- ⁴ “Accept responsibility for their care” trans. *episkopountes* “Accept responsibility for the care of someone, oversee” (*BAGD*).
- ⁵ “*God’s caring power*” trans. the Eng. “God’s mighty hand.” “When this type of expression is used in the OT it generally speaks of God’s power to intervene for the sake of his people” (I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, 1991).
- ⁶ Regarding Matthew 20:26-28 C. J. Mahaney comments:
 What I find especially fascinating and instructive is that Jesus does not categorically criticize or forbid the desire and ambition to be great. Instead, He clearly redirects that ambition, redefines it, and purifies it. . . . It means turning upside down our entrenched, worldly ideas on the definition of greatness. . . .
 As sinfully and culturally defined, pursuing greatness looks like this: Individuals motivated by self-interest, self-indulgence, and a false sense of self-sufficiency pursue selfish ambition for the purpose of self-glorification. Contrast that with the pursuit of true greatness as biblically defined: Serving others for the glory of God. This is the genuine expression of humility; this is true greatness as the Savior defined it. (*Humility: True Greatness*, Kindle Edition [Random House, 2008], 386-375).
- ⁷ The common trans. of a contrast between “little” and “much” suggests quantity. But the contrast Jesus is speaking of concerns importance. “*Unimportant*” trans. *elachistō* “being considered of very little importance” (*BAGD*, #3). See use of same word in Luke 12:26; 19:17. “*Great importance*” trans. *pollō* “to be high on a scale of extent, great” (*BAGD*, #3).
- ⁸ Mahaney, 692-698.

Chapter 8

The Requirements of Visionary Faith III

Examples of Humility

Table of Topics

- A) From Pride to Humility: *Moses*
- B) From Humility to Pride: *King Saul*
- C) A Great Example of Humility: *John the Baptist*
- D) The Greatest Example of Humility: *Jesus Christ*

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- Saul is the premier biblical example of a man who started humble, but became destructively proud when God exalted him.
- Perhaps the greatest biblical example of humility, apart from our perfect Lord, was John the Baptist.

A) From Pride to Humility: *Moses*

Moses is obviously portrayed in Scripture as a very humble man. In fact, in the face of receiving harsh and false criticism from none other than his own brother and sister Aaron and Miriam, he did not defend himself (Num 12:1-2). It is in this context that we read: “*Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the Earth*” (Num 12:3).¹

But this was not always the case. At one point in his life we would suggest Moses was more *prideful* than anyone else on the face of the Earth. We believe this is demonstrated in his first encounter with God.

First of all, Moses knew it was God speaking to him from the burning bush. God revealed to him: “*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*” (Exod 3:6). But

Moses' pride, self-focus and self-reliance prohibited him from responding to God as his God.

Moses knew the God of the Universe was telling him: "*I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people the Israelites out of Egypt*" (v. 10). "*But Moses said to God, 'Who am I'?*" (v. 11). God had told him who he was. He was the one God had chosen for a mission and Moses repeatedly attempts to refuse God's command, and convey he knows better than His Maker.

God said He wanted Moses to go and promised him, "*I will be with you.*" God even divinely predicted/promised, "*When you have [actually accomplished what I told you to do and] brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain*" (v. 12)." For any humble man, knowing that it is God saying these things, they would be enough. Not for Moses. He asks more questions and makes excuses in the face of Almighty God!

God said, "*The elders of Israel will listen to you*" (v. 18). Moses responds, "*What if they do not believe me or listen to me?*" God just said they will. Who does this guy think he is?

The One whom Moses knew as the Almighty Ruler of the Universe told Moses to go and speak with the elders of Israel and promised that He would be with him, and Moses responded: "*O Lord, I have never been a good speaker, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue*" (4:10).

First of all, we would suggest Moses was lying. "*In the past*" He had grown up and lived for forty years in the royal family of the most advanced civilization on Earth. Are we to believe he was not taught to speak well? Now he has resorted to more than making excuses, but is even lying to God's face.

Secondly, it is an arrogant, hypocritical man who would address God as "*Lord*" throughout this conversation, and yet treat Him like a mere man making suggestions. We are reminded of Christ's rebuke: "*Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?*" (Luke 6:46).

But the pride continues. God reminds Moses of Who made his mouth, promising "*I will help you speak and will teach you what to say*" (v. 11). And God repeats, "*Now go*" (v. 12). And what does Moses say to God? "*O Lord, please send someone else to do it*" (v. 13).

How many men have received such wonderful and personal revelations and promises from God? How many mere men have had the highest privilege of the Creator of the Universe speaking "face to face" with them? And Moses essentially told God, "leave me alone. I don't want anything to do with You, and I don't care a bit about what You want." We suggest again, when Moses first met God, He was the most proud man on the face of the Earth.

Is it any wonder “*the LORD’S anger burned against Moses*” (v. 14)? God knew Moses’ responses were not innocent, but insolent. This passage of Scripture is not about a shy, unpretentious man overwhelmed with the presence and call of God. Rather, it is a remarkable story of the humility of *God* in the face of the most arrogant, unbelieving man.

But God humbled him. He humbled him by showing Moses how powerful God could make him. God humbled him by giving him a love for the people. God humbled him through the experience of leading a whole rebellious, selfish, and *arrogant* nation through a desert once, and then around in circles in it again for forty years. It took a lot for God to pound the pride out of this man, but in the end it could be said, “*Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the Earth*” (Num 12:3). Moses would say the divine “pounding” was worth it, and God was glorified by making the most prideful man, the most humble.

B) From Humility to Pride: King Saul

While Moses grew from extraordinary pride to extraordinary humility, King Saul is a remarkable example of a man falling from humility into pride. We first encounter him as a grown man engaged in the rather lowly mission of finding his father’s lost donkeys (1 Sam 9:3). And not having much success at that (vs. 4-5). It is his servant who suggests seeking spiritual help from the Prophet Samuel. Saul didn’t even have anything to give “*the seer*,” prompting his servant to offer to pay for his services (cf. vs. 6-8).

God intended to greatly glorify Saul for His purposes. The Prophet Samuel tells him in their first meeting: “*Don’t worry about those donkeys that were lost three days ago. They have been found. I am here to tell you that you and your family are the focus of all Israel’s hopes*” (9:20). All Saul wanted from Samuel was help in successfully locating some missing donkeys for his father. God was calling him to be “*the focus of all Israel’s hopes*” to be delivered from their enemies.

Saul’s humble beginnings are again reflected in his response to Samuel’s words: “*But I am only from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel, and my family is the least important of all the families of that tribe. Why are you talking like this to me?*” (v. 21). Later, when his uncle asked him what Samuel the Prophet had said to him, “*Saul replied, ‘He assured us that the donkeys had been found.’ But Saul did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about his kingship*” (10:16).

Saul’s humble view of himself is once again reflected when Samuel calls a meeting of all Israel to anoint Saul as king:

When Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel together, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was chosen. Finally Saul son of Kish was chosen.

But when they looked for Saul they could not find him. So they asked the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?" And the LORD said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage." (10:20-22)

Saul had no desire for the spotlight and was very reluctant to put himself in front of people.

Even after Saul's anointing as King, we read: *"Some trouble-makers said, 'How can this fellow save us?' They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent" (10:27).* A proud man who had just become king would have killed such people.

Later, after his first amazing victory over the Ammonites which resulted in the wonderful rescue of the whole town of Jabesh Gilead (11:1-11) we read: *"The people then said to Samuel, 'Who was it that asked, 'Should Saul reign over us?' Bring these men to us and we will put them to death.' But Saul said, 'No one will be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel'" (11:12).* Not only did he treat his enemies with grace, but fully gave God the credit for the victory.

Finally, after his anointing as King, we read: *"Saul had been plowing a field with his oxen" (11:5),* apparently going back to simply working as a farmer for his father. He did not set himself up in a palace, ordering servants around, and living off of others. He continued to work as a simple farmer.

We hardly ever see Saul in this way. Because he became one of the most arrogant and shallow people in Scripture, we have forgotten that he began as a very shy, simple, and unpretentious man. God had indeed found a humble man. A man who did not think too highly of himself. How wonderful it would have been for him and his nation if his "success" had not made him otherwise. Far too many men want God to glorify them, with no idea how dangerous that can be.

The glory of the mission and responsibility God called Saul to was too much for him. His inward character and relationship with God was too shallow. He gained far too much of his sense of significance and security in his position rather than in his heavenly Father who had so graciously given him such an amazing opportunity. Pride is so incredibly sinister. It sneaks up on us, and before we know it, we are focused on ourselves, instead of God.

Of course, we know Saul's humility, and therefore God's favor, did not last long. Not long after his victory and the praise of the people, Saul was feeling confident in his own wisdom, even if it violated the word of God (cf. 13:5-14; 15:9).

After another gracious victory from God, we read that, “*the men of Israel were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, “Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!” So none of the troops tasted food*” (14:24). Now the focus was on him, not God. And his pride and foolish effort to unnecessarily control his men almost cost his son Jonathan his life (14:38-45), and did cost Saul a great deal of embarrassment and the respect of his men.

When “*Samuel . . . went to meet Saul . . . he was told, ‘Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor’*” (v. 12). How quickly pride can take us to the most demeaning places.

Likewise, we later read that when David was praised by the people for his victories:

Saul was very angry and this refrain greatly offended him. “They have credited David with tens of thousands,” he thought, “but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?” And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David. (1 Sam 18:8-9)

If there are two things that reveal a lack of humility it is anger and jealousy. Saul’s lack of identity in God made him unable to handle or even celebrate the success of another. Saul obviously had no legitimate reason to be angry or jealous toward David.

On the other hand, David had many reasons to be both regarding Saul. It is, in fact probable, that it was in reference to his struggles with Saul that David wrote Psalm 37 including the first verse: “*Do not burn with anger because of evildoers; or be jealous of those who do wrong*” (Ps 37:1).² And David was a good example of this, which is one of many reasons he was also a tremendous example of humility.

Anger is a great danger to those pursuing a *visionary faith*. Often our specific desires and plans for ministry are prompted by some evil or wrong we observe that needs to be righted. Like Saul, something or someone may even be bringing considerable pain and hurt to the people of God. And while it is proper and even necessary to be burdened and motivated by such a need, we should “*not burn with anger because of evildoers.*” We must even forgive those committing the wrong and give them over to God.

This is what David did. He never took revenge on Saul even when he had the opportunity, but let God deal with him. David said to Saul after secretly cutting off a corner of his robe and having a great opportunity to end all the grief Saul was bringing into his life and the nation:

I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the

LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. (1 Sam 24:11-12)

That is a humble man. A man who trusts God and does not unnecessarily take matters into his own hands. David did not let anger be a motivation for his pursuit of becoming king.

Anger is not a power of the Spirit which we need to accomplish our *visionary faith*. We read in James, “*The anger of humns does not accomplish the righteousness of God*” (1:20) or anything else God-glorifying. Accordingly, David writes later in the Psalm:

Do not burn with anger when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not burn with anger—it leads only to evil. (vs. 7-8)

Jealousy is another great danger. Why would we “*be jealous of those who do wrong*” (v. 1)? Because they appear to “*succeed in their ways*” (cf. v. 7). For example, false teachers and false evangelists are extremely popular and prosperous in our present world- the temptation is to burn with anger against them and even envy how many people they are influencing and hurting. But as the Psalm reminds us repeatedly, God will judge such men, both in this life and the next (cf. vs. 2, 9-10).

But we can even struggle more with envying good men. Some men were jealous of the Apostle Paul prompting him to write that some: “*preach Christ out of jealousy and to cause division*” (Phil 1:15). Perhaps we see another servant of God speak powerfully or write popularly. Their churches and ministries seem to grow much faster and bigger than our own. And to make matters harder, you believe some of their teaching, writing, or practices are wrong, unbiblical, and even damaging to God’s people. When we observe someone who has been greatly successful in accomplishing the very ministry or *visionary faith* we are pursuing, envy is a powerful and destructive temptation. “*A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones*” (Prov 14:30).

“*Envy*” is one of those “*evils*” that “*come from inside a person and make them unclean*” (Mark 7:22-23) and is the reason behind the commandment:

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exod 20:17) Including their ministry.

We are warned against the power of envy in Proverbs 27:4: “*Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?*” We are warned of its sinfulness in James:

If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (Jms 3:14-16)

Accordingly, jealousy and envy are included in several NT lists of gross sin (cf. Mark 7:21-23; Rom 1:28-31; 13:13; 2 Cor 12:20; 1 Tim 6:3-5; Tit 3:3-4; 1 Pet 2:1), including one of the “obvious” “acts of the sinful nature” (Gal 5:19-20). God hates jealousy. When Miriam and Aaron became jealous against Moses, “*The anger of the LORD burned against them*” (Num 12:9). Their envy was such a “disgrace,” that God commanded concerning Miriam: “*Confine her outside the camp for seven days*” (v. 14). And God may discipline us for our jealousy as well.

Do not let Solomon’s commentary be true of you: “*I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man’s envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind*” (Eccl 4:4). Is envy your motivation in ministry? Then you are not humble and God will not bless you. “*Love . . . does not envy*” (1 Cor 13:4), and love, not envy, must be our motivation for ministry. And it is those temptations to jealousy that will especially test our humility, and for which we must cling to the wonderful promises regarding humility shared below.

Petty, proud people cannot enjoy the success of others, even when it benefits themselves! Do we see how quickly Saul’s whole focus became himself, instead of His God or God’s people?

All of this prompted the sad response of the God Who had chosen Him: “*I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from Me and has not carried out My instructions*” (15:11). Pride not only hurts us and those around us, it hurts God. God took this personally.

We read God’s sad commentary on this man’s life, and what pride does to men:

Samuel said to Saul. “Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night: “Tell me,” Saul replied.

“Although you were once small in your own eyes [even humble], you still became the head of the tribes of Israel. The LORD anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸ And He sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.’ ¹⁹ Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you take the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?”

“But I did obey the LORD,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. ²¹ The soldiers took sheep and

cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.” (15:17-21)

God had commanded Saul: “Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys” (15:3). Saul obviously disobeyed. Pride distorts a man’s reverence for God. Proud leaders will always minimize their sin, deceiving themselves into thinking that the accomplishment of the mission (as they see it) justifies compromise, and that they are somehow above God’s commands because they are accomplishing God’s work.

We’ll say it again. As we will discuss further below, God desires purity more than “progress.” Accordingly:

Samuel replied: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying His voice? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has rejected you as king.” (15:22-23)

When Saul finally admits his sin, he explains, “*I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them*” (v. 24). What he was afraid of losing was the false sense of significance he received from the praise and popularity of the people. This becomes evident when he says to Samuel: “*I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God*” (v. 30). The people no longer belong to God, but are Saul’s people. And God is no longer Saul’s God, but Samuel’s God.

God’s sad commentary on the life of this leader concludes with: “*Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD was grieved that He had made Saul king over Israel*” (v. 35). And so were the people of Israel who had suffered greatly under Saul, as did Jonathan his own honorable son, and of course David, who became Saul’s greatest enemy, when all David wanted was to be Saul’s greatest servant. And all of this because a humble man could not stay humble when God tried to use and bless him for the sake of others. As Solomon wrote: “*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall*” (Prov 16:18).

And here we must ask ourselves if our own sense of significance is too dependent on the success of our *visionary faith*? Will we become proud, petty, and paranoid if our *human plans to obey God’s commands* fail or need to change? How important is the opinion of others to us?

The Apostle John describes some men who loved their position more than their God when he writes:

Many even among the leaders believed in Him [Jesus]. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. (John 12:43; cf. 5:44)

Let that never, ever be true of us. Such a sinister need for the praise of people will destroy us and our ministry- the devil will make sure of it.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul warned that you really cannot serve God if your sense of significance and security are dependent on the opinions of other people. This would seem to be precisely what motivated the false teachers in Galatia who were preaching “*a different gospel*” (1:6) in order to avoid “*the offense of the cross*” (5:11). To the contrary, the Apostle wrote: “*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ*” (Gal 1:10; cf. 1 Cor 4:3-5; 1 Thess 2:4). And neither could we.

C) A Great Example of Humility: John the Baptist

Perhaps the greatest biblical example of humility, apart from our perfect Lord, was John the Baptist. Jesus Himself said he was “*more than a Prophet*” (Matt 11:9). John held the same extremely rare distinction of actually having had his ministry prophesied about in the OT, Jesus saying, “*This is the one who it is written about: ‘I will send My messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you’*” (v. 10). Accordingly, Jesus went on to say: “*I tell you the truth: Of all humans there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist*” (vs. 11, 13-14). No higher praise could be given a mere mortal, especially considering Who said it.

And yet we see John resist the temptation to glorify himself throughout his ministry. Luke records that there were, “*crowds coming out to be baptized by him*” (3:7). He was so popular that, “*the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was*” (John 1:19). He was so powerful that, “*The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ*” (Luke 3:15). That is the kind of ministry some men dream of.

But what was John’s response?:

He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Christ. . . . [There] is . . . one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.” (John 1:19-20, 26)

Earlier he had proclaimed: *“This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me’”* (John 1:15; cf. v. 30). While many popular ministers seem to exalt themselves more than Christ, John did not.

And he understood the limits of his God-given role:

Jesus and His disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where He spent some time with them, and baptized people. ²³ *Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there, and people were constantly coming to be baptized.* ²⁴ *(This was before John was put in prison.)*

²⁵ *An argument developed between some of John’s disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing.* ²⁶ *They came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him.”* (John 3:22-26)

Likewise, we later read, *“Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John”* (John 4:1). Many ministers would become jealous in such circumstances. Not John:

To this John replied, “A man can receive only what is given him from Heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of Him.’ The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less. (John 3:27-30)

John understood that our ministries are given to us by God and that to a large measure, the fruit of them depends on God. And he had a very good understanding of his ministry as one who points people to Christ, not one who accepts the adulation of Christ. And of course, John’s statement that *“He must become greater; I must become less”* needs to be the daily confession of every servant of Christ.

D) The Greatest Example of Humility: Christ

Christ, of course is our supreme example of humility. As the ancient Christian song ³ reminds us:

Jesus Christ existed in the form of God and did not think that equality with God was something to be grasped. Instead He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming the likeness of humans, and appearing as a man. He humbled Himself by

becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
(Phil 2:6-8)

In the Incarnation to save us, Christ descended from the highest position in the Universe to the lowest in the Universe. Goodness, “*God made Him Who had no sin to be sin for us*” (2 Cor 5:21). The Son of God became sin. For us. *That* is the greatest possible humiliation.

Along these lines, C. S. Lewis wrote:

In the Christian story God descends to re-ascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still to the very roots and seabed of the Nature He had created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him.

One may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to color and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks surface again, holding in his hand the dripping, precious thing that he went down to recover.

He and it are both colored now that they have come up into the light: down below, where it lay colorless in the dark, he lost his color too.⁴

Christ had an accurate and healthy understanding of how great He was. But with that knowledge He humbled Himself to be what people needed Him to be. Likewise, we are royalty in the Kingdom of God and will be for all eternity. But we choose to be the servant of all because that is what people need us to be.

Extras & Endnotes

Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, we are thankful for the examples of pride and humility that You give us in Scripture. We want to avoid the pitfalls of Saul's life and embrace the humility of John the Baptist. Again, all because we want to glorify You.

Gauging Our Grasp

- 5) What are some statements and actions of Saul that revealed his pride? What would tempt you to do similar things?
- 6) What are some statements and actions of John the Baptist that revealed his humility? Are there areas of your life that you need to do the same?

Recommended Reading

Perilous Pursuits, Joseph Stowell. A good book on the pursuit of significance apart from our relationship with God.

Ordering Your Private World, William McDonald. In a beginning chapter the author provides a very insightful contrast between being *called* to ministry by God, and being *driven* to ministry by our flesh, using John the Baptist and Saul as examples of each respectively.

Publications & Particulars

¹ Many are somewhat surprised to see this statement of Moses, assuming he wrote it about himself and therefore acting in contradiction to it. It is possible that Moses wrote it, and that it is actually a demonstration of his great humility as many commentators suggest (Calvin, Barnes, Keil and Delitzsch). However, most modern, evangelical OT scholars recognize some editorial work from the scribes who copied and distributed the OT, and this would seem to be a good example. Note that many of those scribes were known to be Prophets themselves, and so even their editorial work was divine revelation.

² The word “*fret*” (NIV, NASB) or “*worry*” (NLT) is not the best translation of *charah*. Normally “fret” is understood to mean “worry” but that does not seem to be David’s intended meaning here. Literally *charah* means to burn, particularly with anger. Keil and Delitzsch define its use here as: “to get into a glow . . . the incontrollable heat of impetuous zeal which would gladly call down fire from heaven.” Barnes writes: “The Hebrew word here means properly to burn, to be kindled, to be inflamed, and is often applied to anger, as if under its influence we become ‘heated’.”

³ Virtually all NT scholars recognize Philippians 2:5-11 as a song that the early churches would have set music to and sung in their services. See Peter O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC) (Eerdmans, 1991], 186 ff.)

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (Macmillan, 1947), 135.

Chapter 9

The Resources of Visionary Faith*All from God***Table of Topics**

- A) Our Prayer
- B) God With Us
- C) God's Protection
- D) God's Provision
- E) God's Power

*Extras & Endnotes***Primary Points**

- A *visionary faith* capable of glorifying God will be beyond our abilities and will require divine involvement and intervention.
- “*I am with you always*” is the special, all-encompassing promise God gives to anyone attempting to serve Him.
- Five vital things that we need from God in our *visionary faith*: protection, provision, power, opportunity, and people.
- Difficult personal trials in our lives, or others we are responsible for, can hinder us and we must be asking God to protect us.
- Even *God's* work requires money on this Earth, making His promises to supply such needs so valuable.
- God is not going to accomplish our *visionary faith* apart from us, or merely by working around us, but by working *through us*.
- All of the supernatural power and strength we need to accomplish our *visionary faith* comes from the Spirit of God. Foremost it will require “*the fruit of the Spirit*.”
- Paul's spiritual gifts gave him his specific passions for ministry, the power to pursue those passions.

A) Our Prayer

In addition to a divine expectation to create something God-glorifying with our life, we have a divine invitation (even command) to “ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (John 15:7). Of course there are conditions on this amazing promise, particularly that it be within God’s will. But do not ignore the incredible opportunity that the Ruler and Creator of the Universe grants us in prayer- “ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (John 15:7). Think about how different your life can be by tapping into the potential of God’s miraculous intervention.

Any *visionary faith* that is worthy of glorifying God must be prayed for. It is a reminder of the need for prayer with which the Apostle begins his exhortation to the Thessalonians regarding *visionary faith*:

Because of the return of Christ, we always pray that God will think you have lived up to His commanding invitation to experience your special privilege and responsibility as a Christian. We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted your faith. Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of you, and you will be honored along with Him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 1:11-12)

Our burden and even desperation to see our *visionary faith* fulfilled is the fuel of prayer. And prayer is the stimulus for the divine intervention we need to accomplish our *visionary faith*. If we are not praying for it, we do not want it badly enough. If we are not praying for it, we have far too much confidence in ourselves. If we are not praying for our *visionary faith* it is perhaps because it is not challenging enough. Take full advantage of the invitation to prayer that God gives us. “You do not have, because you do not ask God” (Jms 4:2).

B) God With Us

Our text says: *We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted your faith*” (2 Thess 1:11). The Apostle implies here that in order to “accomplish” our *visionary faith* God’s “power” will be necessary. Obviously, a *visionary faith* capable of glorifying God will be considerably beyond our abilities and will require divine involvement and intervention. This is precisely why the Apostle began his exhortation to *visionary faith* with, “*we always pray*” We need people

praying for us because we will need God supernaturally working with, for, in, and around us and others.

Thank God then for His wonderful promise to all of those with a *visionary faith* that involves some aspect of Christ's Great Commission. Jesus said:

"All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make followers of Me in all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the very end of the age." (Matt 28:18-20)

"*I am with you always.*" Of course, this is a general promise for all believers (cf. John 14:18-23). Accordingly, several NT documents end with something like: "*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all*" (2 Cor 13:14; cf. Gal 6:18; 1 Thess 5:28; Rev 22:21). This is simply another way of describing God being with us. But in the Great Commission, there is a specific promise to those who are pursuing the supernatural task of making and teaching followers of Jesus Christ. God will be with them in a special way, helping them in this task.

"*I am with you always.*" This is the same promise He gave His servants Joshua (Josh 1:5), Isaac (Gen 26:3), Jacob (Gen 31:3), Joseph (Gen 48:21; 39:2-3, 21), Moses (Exod 3:12), and Paul (Act 18:10; 2 Tim 4:17-18). It seems to be the special promise God gives to anyone attempting to serve Him.

"*I am with you always.*" He does not tell us specifically how or what He means. But it is the all-inclusive nature of the promise that makes it so wonderful. He will simply be "*with*" us, and that reminds one of the proverbial blank check. He will be with us to provide *whatever* we need in order to fulfill the part of the Great Commission we are pursuing. It means God will help us do what we cannot do.

There are at least five vital things that we need from God in order to accomplish our *visionary faith*: protection, provision, power, opportunity, and people.

C) God's Protection

There are a myriad of things that can prohibit us from pursuing, let alone accomplishing our *visionary faith*. Serious illness or extraordinary needs in our family are examples. It is difficult, if not impossible, to serve God much if we are not physically healthy. And while we have a responsibility in this area, we also need God to protect

us from ailments that will keep us from accomplishing what we want to do for Him.

Difficult personal trials in our lives, or the lives of those we are responsible for, can also be a hindrance to the work we want to do for God. We must be asking God to protect and bless them as well so that we have the freedom to serve God beyond our responsibility to our family and others.

We also need protection from evil people that would hinder God's work. Paul writes: "*Alexander the metalworker harmed me a lot*" (2 Tim 4:14). And satan will surely raise up servants of his own to oppose us. In some countries, such opposition can include imprisonment and even death. Nonetheless, in Paul's case, God did not allow the harm caused by "*Alexander*" to thwart the Apostle's work, as he writes: "*But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the Gospel would be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it*" (v. 17). His mission was accomplished in spite of "*Alexander*." And we can trust that our *visionary faith* will be accomplished in spite of our own Alexanders.

We too can claim the Apostle's promise that "*The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack*" (v. 18). Likewise David learned from experience: "*If the LORD delights in a person's life, He will make their steps firm. Even if they stumble, they will not fall because the LORD holds them up with His hand*" (Ps 37:23).

"*Our fight against the devil*" to advance God's Kingdom on Earth "*is not against humans. We are fighting against the rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against spiritual powers in this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the spiritual realms*" (Eph 6:10). Our "*enemy the devil*" (1 Pet 5:8) is constantly working to stop and hinder our work for God in all sorts of ways. Accordingly, we must "*pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints*" (Eph 6:18).

D) God's Provision

"*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*" (1 Tim 6:10). But it sure helps us do God's work. In fact, doing God's work on this Earth requires the things money buys. Finances will be necessary to fulfilling your *visionary faith* in all sorts of ways. Which is why His promises to supply such needs are so valuable. We know them well, but does our worry over the physical provision we need reveal that we really do not believe them?

God wants us to trust Him for these things in our mission for Him. He told His disciples when He sent them out: *“Do not take anything for your journey including a staff, bag, bread, money, or extra clothes”* (Luke 9:3). Why? Because He wanted to provide for them along the way, particularly through the people they would be ministering to (cf. *“Stay in one house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, because the worker deserves their wages”* Luke 10:7).

Christ’s well-known instruction regarding provision contains an important command and a wonderful promise:

Do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ Unbelievers run after all these things, but your Father in Heaven knows that you need them. Unlike unbelievers, seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt 6:31-33)

The command, of course, is to not worry about the things money buys (cf. Phil 4:6-7). The promise is that God will ensure that we have *“all these things”* we need if we *“seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.”* If we are pursuing the right things in the right way we will have everything we need to accomplish our *visionary faith*, even if God has to miraculously intervene. And He probably will.

If we are expecting God to be generous to us, we had better be generous to Him. Trusting God with our finances also means giving them sacrificially. Paul’s promises regarding giving money especially apply to those in ministry:

Now the point is this: The one who plants only a little will also reap only a little. The one who plants generously will also reap generously. . . And God is able to abundantly provide every kind of grace to you, so that in everything, at all times, you will have enough of everything you need, so you will have an abundance for every good work. (1 Cor 9:6-8)

There are few divine promises better than that, making our own sacrificial giving essential to doing great things for God.

E) God’s Power

Paul’s statement above that, *“the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength”* (2 Tim 4:17) is a wonderful description of God being with us. This strength He gives can simply be physical and mental strength beyond our natural abilities.

More importantly, however, it is spiritual power. The Apostle writes:

All glory to God, Who is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ask or imagine through the power at work within us. Glory to the Father in the Church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen. (Eph 3:20-21)

This is precisely what we are asking God to do in our *visionary faith*: “*accomplish infinitely more than we would ask or imagine*” to bring “*glory*” to “*Christ Jesus*” “*in the church.*” How will that happen? “*through the power at work within us.*” In other words, God is not going to accomplish our *visionary faith* apart from us, or merely by working around us, but by working *through us*. By giving us the power to accomplish things for Him.

Again, the Apostle wrote the Thessalonians: “*We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted your faith.* (2 Thess 1:11-12)

Of course this power consists of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. First and foremost our *visionary faith* will require “*the effects of the Holy Spirit in our lives*” which “*is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, reliability, humility, and control over our feelings and actions*” (Gal 5:22-23). Without these supernatural powers and virtues, doing anything for God will be impossible, if not damaging to His name. The Apostle speaks of these very powers of the Spirit when he writes the Colossians:

We have continued praying for you ever since we first heard about you. . . . We . . . pray that you will be strengthened with His glorious power so that you will have all the patience and endurance you need. (Col 1:9, 11)

The Greek word translated “*strengthened*” is *dunamoumenoi* which means “to cause someone to be able to do something, enable.”¹ Paul is praying that God would give the Colossians a God-like “*glorious power*” of supernatural “*patience and endurance.*” As discussed thoroughly in the previous chapter, such powers are necessary for any *visionary faith* to be fulfilled. And the reason Paul is praying for them is that they must come from God. We will not have such “*patience and endurance*” ourselves.

Later in Colossians, Paul speaks of this same supernatural, God-given power to work hard for God:

*We proclaim Christ, correcting and teaching everyone with all the necessary wisdom. We do this so that when we meet Christ we may present everyone before Him as fully mature Christians. It is for this purpose that I work and struggle with Christ’s energy powerfully working within me. (Col 1:28-29)*²

Likewise, the Apostle credits his supernatural endurance to work hard to the grace-power of God when He writes:

It is because of God's special grace toward me that I am an Apostle. And I have not wasted the spiritual gift and power God gave me. On the contrary, I have worked harder than all of the other Apostles. But it has not been just me, but the power of God working through me. (1 Cor 15:10)

Indeed, as we have noted in the previous chapter, supernatural hard work and endurance, the kind that was necessary for Noah to build the ark, is necessary for any great and glorious thing to be accomplished for God. But the strength to do this is given by God as His grace works in us in answer to prayer.

There are powers beyond the virtues of the Spirit, and the strength of the Spirit, that are necessary as well. The Scripture refers to these powers as spiritual gifts. As discussed in chapter 1, this aspect of God's grace manifests itself in unique and supernatural desires and abilities needed to accomplish God's work. This is another aspect of God's grace that is supernatural power for serving God. Paul says this very thing when he writes:

To each one of us a special grace power to serve has been given according to the generosity of Christ . . . Christ Himself gave this grace power to people enabling some to be Apostles, some to be Prophets, some to be Evangelists, and some to be Pastors and Teachers.

The purpose of these ministries is to mend and prepare God's people for works of service so that the local church will be built up. The ultimate goal is for us all to reach unity in the doctrine and knowledge of the Son of God and become spiritually mature to the point of the fullness of Christ. . . .

Through Christ and the ministers He gives the whole local church, joined and held together by every supporting relationship, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph 4:11-13, 16) ³

Evidently, nothing significant is accomplished in the Church apart from these grace gifts and ministries of God's power. It was Paul's spiritual gifts that not only gave him his specific passions for ministry as discussed in chapter 1, but gave him power to pursue those passions. As he says to the Ephesians: *"I became a servant of this Gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of His power"* (Eph 3:7). God's grace-power, particularly through spiritual gifts is the fuel for accomplishing our *visionary faith* and it again comes only from God, by His grace, through His Spirit, and according to His choosing.

All of the supernatural power and strength we need to accomplish our *visionary faith* comes from the Spirit of God. Here we are reminded that Jesus told His disciples not to begin their ministry until they had received “power” from the “*Holy Spirit*” indwelling them (Acts 1:4-8). We now have that power.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, thank You that you are eager and willing to provide everything we need to serve You. We commit to seeking first Your kingdom and righteousness in order to experience Your promises to provide.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why do we need to pray for divine involvement in our pursuit of a *visionary faith* that glorifies God?
- 2) What does Christ’s promise: “I am with you always” mean to you?
- 3) Why will we need God’s protection as we pursue our *visionary faith*?
- 4) Why will we need God’s provision as we pursue our *visionary faith*?
- 5) What are the various ways that the Holy Spirit empowers us in accomplishing our *visionary faith*?

Publications & Particulars

¹ BAGD.

² “*All the necessary wisdom*” lit. Eng. “all wisdom”. Paul is combatting “the Colossian heretics who boasted of their superior wisdom” (Peter O’Brien, *Colossians*, 1982). “*When we meet Christ*” trans. Eng. “present.” “When the apostle speaks of presenting everyone fully grown in Christ, he has the coming of Christ in mind” (O’Brien).

³ “*Special grace power to serve*” reflects that spiritual gifts is the context. “The *charis* [grace] of God manifests itself in various *charismata* [spiritual gifts]: Rom 12:6; Eph 4:7; 1 Pet 4:10” (*BAGD*).

“*Mend and prepare*” trans. *katartismōn*. In classical Gr. the verb *katarizō* meant “to put in order, restore, furnish, prepare, equip. *Katarsis and katartismōn* “means restoration.” In Matt 4:21 and Mark 1:19 it is used of repairing fishing nets (*NIDNTT*). The word was used repeatedly in ancient Gr. to refer to setting a broken bone.

“*Local church*” trans. Eng. “body of Christ” which is not referring to the universal body of Christ but local church in which these ministries would practically operate and where the saints would serve.

“*Doctrine*” trans. Eng. “the faith” which is usually understood as the doctrines and beliefs of Christianity. This fits the context of v. 14.

“*Relationship*” trans Gr. *apēs* which is best trans. “connection.” NT scholar Harold Hoehner, after a detailed description of the issues writes: “In conclusion, it seems apparent that *apēs* is best rendered “connection” because this is the predominant meaning of the word in classical Greek and the LXX (Gr. trans. of the OT), and makes the most sense in the present context. . . This supports the concept that as each member utilizes the gifts they makes connections with other members of the body” (*Ephesians*, 2002). This also fits the fact that Paul says this is all happening “in love”.

Chapter 10**Resources of Visionary Faith II**

Table of Topics

- A) God's Opportunities
- B) God's People
- C) God's Promises
- D) Growing in our Faith in God's Provision

*Extras & Endnotes***Primary Points**

- Waiting and watching for the opportunities we need to pursue our *visionary faith* is perhaps the hardest part of seeing it realized. It will be tempting to manipulate things and put yourself forward to create opportunities.
- God makes us wait because we think we are ready for opportunities before God knows we are.
- In the 14 some years between David's anointing and his reigning God was preparing him in the wilderness for the latter.
- God does not waste our waiting, and neither should we.
- There is no doubt that the accomplishing of your *visionary faith* will require the help of many people. If your vision does not need others, it is probably a deficient one. God rarely uses a man alone. Not even Jesus.
- Psalm 37 contains one of the most encouraging and powerful promises concerning a *visionary faith* in all of Scripture.
- God grows our *empowering faith* in His promises and provision one step at a time.

A) God's Opportunities

The Apostle Paul was a tremendous Evangelist and uniquely possessed *“the Gospel”* which *“is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes”* (Rom 1:16). He also had amazing gifts of knowledge (cf. 2 Cor 11; Eph 3:2-9) and teaching available to grow saints in their faith. And as noted, he was willing and able to sacrificially work extremely hard.

But all the God-given power, abilities, knowledge, and desires the Apostle had, would be useless without God-given opportunities to use them.¹ All of our powers, knowledge, and even our *visionary faith* itself, are for the sake of meeting real needs in the life of real people. There is no such thing as a *visionary faith* for God that does not somehow connect with people. And usually, God must grant us those connections before we can use abilities, give our knowledge, and fulfill our desires.

Along these lines, the Apostle wrote the Romans:

One of the things I always pray for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you. I long to visit you so I can share a spiritual gift with you that will help you grow strong in the Lord. (Rom 1:10-11)

Having the ability and desire to share a *“spiritual gift”* was not enough. Paul also needed *“God”* to be *“willing”* to provide an *“opportunity”* to *“see”* the Roman Christians in order to bless and build them up in some way.

Likewise, the Apostle asked the Colossians to *“pray for us, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ”* (4:3). Again, it was not enough for the Apostle to have the valuable supernatural knowledge of *“the mystery of Christ”* but he also needed *“a door for [the] message”* and an opportunity to expose people to it.

Paul recognized such opportunities for ministry were the work of God. He told the Corinthians *“When I came to Troas to preach the Good News of Christ, the Lord opened a door of opportunity for me.”* (2 Cor 2:12). This is why such opportunities directed his ministry. He wrote, *“I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me”* (1 Cor 16:9).

Likewise, we often need to wait on God to provide the opportunities we need to see our *visionary faith* fulfilled. Someone desiring to be an Evangelist, missionary, or church planter can stand on any street corner and preach the Gospel. But *“a great door for effective work,”* the kind worthy of having you stay and do ministry in that place, must come from God.

A man with gifts of leadership and/or teaching will understandably desire to use those gifts to bless people and glorify God. But he cannot create the opportunity to do so by himself. He cannot create a church. God must give him a church to be faithful with and to grow.

Waiting and watching for the opportunities we need to pursue our *visionary faith* is perhaps the hardest part of seeing it realized. It will be tempting to manipulate things and put yourself forward to create opportunities.

This is where the encouragements and promises regarding humility and faithfulness discussed in the previous chapter will be tested. It is when we are waiting that we must remember to: *“Humble yourselves under God’s caring power so that He will exalt you at the right time.”* (1 Pet 5:6) and *“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”* (Matt 23:12). Do you want opportunities that you can create and force for yourself, or do you want the kind of opportunities that only God can give you? He gives them to those who are willing to wait on Him.

We must humble ourselves under God-ordained authority in the church that we respect and trust, and allow God to work through them to grant those opportunities. We must be faithful with the ministry and responsibility that God has already given us. We must hold on to those promises about humility and faithfulness, trusting God to work in and around us to prepare both us and others for our ministry.

Speaking to His people held captive in Babylon, God gave them a rather famous promise about waiting through the Prophet Isaiah. First, He acknowledges their concerns.

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God”? (Isa 40:27)

Do we not feel this way at times? Especially in our pursuit of a *visionary faith* to do something for God? It may seem our life and “cause” is too insignificant to God, and therefore “hidden” and “disregarded” by Him. It may seem like He is not helping us. The obstacles to even having the *opportunity* to do what we want to do for God, may seem even bigger than God Himself. And because the need seems so great, but our opportunity to help so far away, we are tempted to question whether God is in control, or cares, or knows the situation. God answers:

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the Earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one can fathom. (v. 28)

Of course there is no obstacle to our *visionary faith* that is too difficult for God. He created the Universe. And His understanding of our circumstances, desires, concerns, *and the right timing to intervene* is infinite. As one commentator explained this verse: “God’s people were to know that His understanding possessed infallible wisdom for determining the right point of time at which to interpose with His aid.”

² Another commentator writes:

This verse is designed to reprove the people for their want of confidence in God. The idea is, ‘If God is so great; if he arranges the hosts of heaven with such unerring skill, causing all the stars to observe their proper place and their exact times, the interests of his people are safe in his hands.’ . . .

To furnish an argument to meet this state of despondency, the prophet sets before them this sublime description of the faithfulness and the power of God. ³

Indeed, our times of waiting will test our trust in God and confidence in His care and power. David said: “*One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving*” (Ps 62:11-12). We must never waver in our absolute confidence of these two things while we wait.

The passage in Isaiah encouraging waiting on God continues:

He gives strength to the weary, and to those who lack power He increases their power. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. Yet those who wait for the LORD will renew their strength; They will rise up with wings like eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not become weary. (Isa 40:27-31)

Do you see the reason God has us wait? It is only “*those who wait for the LORD [who] will renew their strength.*” God wants to increase our strength so that we may soar, run, and walk in ministry and “*not become weary.*” As we have described in a previous chapter, fulfilling a vision for God requires a great deal of endurance and hard work. We think we are ready before God knows we are. “*Youths*” think they are ready to do for God what they desire, but if they will not wait for God to give them more power and wisdom, they will “*grow tired and weary*” and even “*young men stumble and fall*” if they are not prepared. We need more power, character, and wisdom than we usually think we do in order to accomplish our *visionary faith*. But God knows what will be needed and He wants to provide us with it.

Along these lines, John Ortberg writes in reference to Romans 5:3-4: “*our troubles produce endurance, endurance produces proven character, and character produces hope*”:

Paul says that while we are waiting for God to set everything right, we suffer. But suffering produces endurance; endurance, character; and character, hope. God is producing these qualities in us as we wait.

Waiting is not just something we have to do while we get what we want. It is part of the process of becoming what God wants us to be. . . . We forget that his work in us while we wait is as important as what it is we think we are waiting for. . . .

Waiting is, by its nature, something only the humble can do with grace. When we wait for something, we recognize that we're not in control. . . . Waiting is a good thing for people like me. It reminds me that I am not in charge. Waiting humbles me in ways I need to be humbled. . . .

We are not just waiting around, we are waiting on God. Therefore we can trust his wisdom and timing. Because waiting reminds us that we are waiting *for* someone, the single most important activity in waiting is prayer. ⁴

While we are waiting God is preparing us. He is increasing the power of the Spirit in us, by maturing us in the virtues and developing our gifts. That waiting may occur in a wilderness as described in a previous chapter. It may simply mean waiting.

Remember Saul who would not wait as he was instructed because he was afraid and “*felt compelled*” not to wait (cf. 1 Sam 13:7-12). Samuel’s response may be applicable to anyone who will not wait on God as instructed:

Samuel said, ‘You acted like a fool. You have not obeyed the command the LORD your God gave you. If you had obeyed and waited, He would have established your rule over Israel forever. But now your kingdom will not endure. The LORD has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him leader of His people, because you have not obeyed the LORD’S command’ (1 Sam 13:13-14)

Contrast Saul’s refusal to wait on God with the man God chose to replace him. David was anointed king as a youth, probably no more than 16 years of age (cf. 1 Sam 16:8-12). He did not become king until age 30 (cf. 2 Sam 5:4). What was he doing in the 14 some years in between? He was in the wilderness waiting. He was in the wilderness being prepared for what he was anointed to be. And while he was waiting, God was developing in him the humility, courage, and faith David would need to be a great king.

God does not waste our waiting, and neither should we. There are often many things for us to do in preparation for whatever opportunities

God may give for us to serve Him. So there will probably be work to do while we are waiting, including of course being faithful with what God has already given us. But God knows the waiting itself does all sorts of things in our life to prepare us to be holy, mature, strong, and wise enough to make the most of the opportunities He will give us.

B) God's People

There is no doubt that the accomplishing of your *visionary faith* will require the help of many people. You will need people to provide finances, different spiritual gifts, and works of service. If your vision does not need others, it is probably a deficient one.

Notice in our central text from 2 Thessalonians that Paul is addressing a congregation- not a person. All of the references to “*you*” are in the plural in Greek. Whatever they were going to do for God, He wanted them to do it together:

Because of the return of Christ, we always pray that God will think you [together] have lived up to His commanding invitation to experience your special privilege and responsibility as a Christian. We pray that through His power you [together] will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted your faith [together]. (2 Thess 1:11-12)

God rarely uses a man alone. Even Noah had his sons. And not even Jesus worked alone, but purposely invited 12 men to join Him in serving God together. In a prayer to the Father, Jesus referred to those men as “*those You have given Me*” (John 17:9). Jesus understood that God had provided those men in order that He would accomplish His task on Earth of starting the Church.

Likewise, we read of David: “*These were the chiefs of David's mighty men. They, together with all Israel, gave his kingship strong support to extend it over the whole land*” (1 Chron 1:11; 2 Sam 23:8-39). David needed fighting men to accomplish God's work for Him, and that is what God gave him. They were such extraordinarily gifted and valiant warriors that they are described in Scripture as “*mighty men*,” but they were David's “*mighty men*,” given to him by God to give “*his kingship strong support to extend it over the whole land.*” David could not have accomplished what he did without them. Neither will you.

C) God's Promises

We have said from the beginning that *visionary faith* is a very challenging aspect of faith because there is so much uncertainty involved. We often do not have a specific command in Scripture for the very specific thing we want to do for God. And we normally do not have a specific biblical promise that our *human plans to obey God's commands* will succeed. Certainly none that are unconditional.

However, we have noted several wonderful promises regarding both the requirements and resources needed to fulfill a *visionary faith* including those regarding our hard work, humility, and holiness, and God's protection, provision, and power. Claim these and find many more for yourself. There is great power in God's promises.

A portion of Scripture that seems to summarize much of what we have discussed in the last two chapters is Psalm 37. David exhorts us in several requirements we have suggested for fulfilling a *visionary faith*:

Do not burn with anger because of evildoers; or be jealous of men who do wrong. . . . Trust in the LORD and do good. Dwell in the land and practice faithfulness. . . . Delight yourself in the LORD . . . Commit your way to the LORD. . . . Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him (vs. 1, 3-5, 7).

These are the conditions of the tremendous promises David encourages us to embrace. These wonderful promises are:

The LORD . . . will give you the desires of your heart. . . . He will do this: He will bring forth your rightness like the light, the vindication of your cause like the noonday sun. (vs. 4, 6)⁵

That is one of the most encouraging and powerful promises concerning a *visionary faith* in all of Scripture. Isn't this what we yearn for? For God to give us our deepest desires for Him? That we would accomplish all that we desire for our God? That others would see the importance of our ministry as much as we do and support it?

D) Growing in our Faith in God's Provision

God grows our faith in His promises and provision one step at a time. Such faith is based on evidence from life experience.⁶ Why did David have faith that God would help him kill Goliath? Because God had helped him previously kill a lion and a bear (cf. 1 Sam 17:34-37).

We too need to remember God's provision in the past so that we can have the faith we need in the present and for the future. Is God's protection over you and your family already obvious? When has He seemed to provide supernatural power and strength? When has He

provided needed opportunities and people? These are the things that build our faith.

Extras & Endnotes

Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven we are so grateful that You are willing to provide everything we need to do Your will. Help us to wait on You for the opportunities, finances, and people necessary to see Your Kingdom advanced in the world.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why is waiting for the opportunities we need to pursue our *visionary faith* perhaps the hardest part of seeing it realized? What convictions and promises can help us wait?
- 2) Why does God want to involve other people in accomplishing our *visionary faith*?
- 3) How does God grow our *empowering faith* in His promises and provision?

Pastoral Practices

- As noted, it is vital that you have your own promises from God concerning your *visionary faith*. Be careful not to take them out of their context in Scripture, and recognize that many of them will be conditional. But find them, meditate on them, trust them, and be empowered by them.

Publications & Particulars

¹ John MacArthur speaks of the importance of God-given opportunities when he writes: Even if a man has outstanding character and an outstanding calling, he must also have opportunity in order to reach the potential of his greatness. John the Baptist entered the scene of history at precisely the right time—according to God's own plan, prediction, and provision. After 400 years with no word from the Lord, Israel was expectant; and until Jesus began His own ministry, John was the focal

point of redemptive history. (*MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997], Matt 11:12-14)

- ² C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.com, 2000), Ps 37:28.
- ³ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM (Findex.Com, 1999).
- ⁴ Ortberg, 179-81, 183.
- ⁵ The Hebrew *tsedeq* means rightness even accuracy (cf. Job 31:6). *NAS Hebrew & Greek Dictionaries*, Robert L. Thomas ed., Electronic Edition, Parsons Technology (Lockman Foundation, 1998)
- ⁶ Regarding the growth of our faith through life experience see section 6.7.C and 6.18.D.

Chapter 11

The Representative of Visionary Faith

Nehemiah

Table of Topics

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Extras & Endnotes

We believe Nehemiah is a unique biblical example of *visionary faith*. Unlike other biblical characters, he was not given direct divine revelation to pursue the mission that he did.¹ He had Scriptures that told him of God's general desires for Jerusalem (cf. Ps 122:6-9), but God did not tell him to do it. In fact, it is possible that if Nehemiah had not decided to pursue the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, that it might not ever have been done.

Accordingly, we believe his desires were an example of *visionary faith*, and a unique one at that. Accordingly, he illustrates many of the things we have discussed in the previous chapters regarding *visionary faith*.

A) Nehemiah's Responsibility

First, we discussed our *responsibility* in *visionary faith* to be faithful with the gifts and resources God gives us, and to use them to serve God in specific ways. Nehemiah was in a unique position to help God's people. As "**cupbearer**" to King Artaxerxes (Neh 1:11) he was one of the most esteemed men by the most powerful person in the world at that time.²

B) Nehemiah's Resolve

Secondly, we discussed the *resolve* involved in such endeavors. Such desires usually spring from a burden we gain by recognizing a great need. This was certainly true of Nehemiah.

He first hears of Jerusalem's condition through his brother who reported, "*The people who survived the exile and have returned to Judea are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire*" (Neh 1:3). Our resolve and the burden that accompanies it will have an emotional element. When Nehemiah hears the state of Jerusalem we read: "*When I heard these things, I sat down and cried. Then for several days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven*" (1:4). That is a man experiencing a burden and forming a resolve.

We have mentioned that in forming our resolve to do something for God, research into the need is valuable. Nehemiah asked questions: "*Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I asked questions about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem*" (1:2).

He also personally visited Jerusalem to investigate the need:

I went to Jerusalem. After staying there three days, I went out during the night with a few men. . . . examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. (2:11, 13)

It was during this personal research that Nehemiah told the people: *“Do you recognize the trouble we are in? Jerusalem is in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace” (2:17; cf. Ezra 1:5).*

The resolve of Nehemiah and the people were tested many times. Nehemiah records:

Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, “The strength of the workers is running out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.”

Also our enemies said, “Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.”

Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.”

Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows.

After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.” (4:10-14)

Nehemiah demonstrated his resolve as well when he responded to his enemies who *“mocked and ridiculed us”* and he *“answered them by saying, ‘The God of Heaven will give us success’”* (Neh 2:19-20; cf. 4:1-9). Likewise, in response to threats of physical harm and death, Nehemiah told the people, *“Our God will fight for us!”* (4:20).

The persecution included slander when an enemy sent this message: *“It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Also, according to these reports you are about to become their king and have even appointed Prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us confer together.” (6:6-7)*

Nehemiah resolutely defended himself, just as we may need to at times as well: *“I sent him this reply: ‘Nothing like what you are saying*

is happening; you are just making it up out of your head” (6:8). Nehemiah understood that his enemies, *“were all trying to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed’”* (6:9).

Opposition against Nehemiah included his enemies trying to distract him from focusing on the mission. Five times his enemies sent a message asking him to meet with them (cf. 6:1-5). He replied every time: *“I am working on a great project and cannot stop. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?”* (6:3).

As is typical, however, some of Nehemiah’s opposition came from those posing as God’s people. He speaks of *“the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me”* (6:14).

C) Nehemiah’s Risks

The risks involved in Nehemiah’s visionary faith were considerable. Even when his king asks him the reason for his sadness, giving Nehemiah a great opportunity to ask for his help, Nehemiah says, *“I was very much afraid”* (2:2). Evidently one did not usually make requests of a Persian king.

Later, of course, the enemies of the Jews even threatened to kill the workers rebuilding the wall. Nehemiah reports: *“Our enemies said, ‘Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work’”* (4:11). And so:

From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. . . . Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. (4:16-18; cf. v. 23)

D) The Requirements of Visionary Faith in Nehemiah’s Life

D.1) Hard work

Obviously it required a great deal of very hard work to rebuild the rubble of Jerusalem’s rock wall, and construct and install gates. Nehemiah comments personally: *“I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land”* (5:16). Likewise, he reported of the people: *“the people worked with all their heart”* (4:6). He describes the work of one group as follows:

The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. They also repaired five hundred yards of the wall as far as the Dung Gate. (3:13)

D.2) Nehemiah's Humility

Nehemiah's humility is demonstrated in at least two ways. First, he prayed a lot. We count ten specific mentions of his praying (cf. 1:4-11; 2:4; 4:9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). He understood that God was His provider, master, and judge.

Secondly, Nehemiah showed a great deal of respect for the pagan king he served under, asking his permission to embark on his mission, and continuing to serve this king throughout his life. He writes: *"In the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Sometime later I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem."* (13:6-7)

D.3) Nehemiah's Holiness

Holiness is especially evident in Nehemiah's life. When he discovered that the Jewish *"nobles and officials"* were financially oppressing their countrymen (cf. 5:1-7), he *"called together a large meeting to deal with them"* (5:7). He told them:

"What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But stop charging interest!" (5:9-10)

Nehemiah likewise reports regarding his integrity:

Also, for the entire twelve years that I was governor of Judah—from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of the reign of King Artaxerxes—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. The former governors had laid heavy burdens on the people, demanding a daily ration of food and wine, besides forty pieces of silver. Even their assistants took advantage of the people. But because I feared God, I did not act that way. (5:14-15)

Once when Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem after an absence he writes:

I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God. I was greatly

displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I returned the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.

I also learned that the portions of food assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and singers responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. So I rebuked the officials and asked them, 'Why is the temple of God neglected?' Then I called them together and assigned them to their responsibilities. (13:7-11)

Likewise, he describes a great deal about how the Jews were breaking the Sabbath. Notice how committed, diligent, and outspoken he was regarding obedience to God's word:

When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day.

Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. But I warned them and said, 'Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will lay hands on you.' From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy. (13:19-22)

E) God's Resources in Nehemiah's Life

E.1) God's protection

As noted above, there was a great amount of opposition from dedicated, angry, and powerful enemies against Nehemiah's mission. Even their lives were threatened. And while Nehemiah took practical precautions in arming the workers, it is obvious that God divinely protected the mission as well. For example, surely because God was working, Nehemiah reports regarding his initial visit to Jerusalem "*The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me*" (2:9).

E.2) God's provision

God's provision of all that Nehemiah needed is especially evident. Building the walls of an entire city required a substantial amount of

materials. Because God granted Nehemiah “*favor in*” the king’s “*sight*” (2:5), Nehemiah writes:

I also said to him, ‘If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe travel until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king’s forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?’ And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests. (2:7-8)

Later, the Jewish people themselves contributed generously to the work:

Some of the family leaders gave gifts for the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold coins, 50 gold basins, and 530 robes for the priests. The other leaders gave to the treasury a total of 20,000 gold coins and some 2,750 pounds of silver for the work. The rest of the people gave 20,000 gold coins, about 2,500 pounds of silver, and 67 robes for the priests. (7:70-72)

E.3) God’s power

When Nehemiah’s enemies “*were all trying to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed’*” Nehemiah “*prayed, ‘God please strengthen my hands’*” (6:9).

God’s provision of strength is evident in that “*the wall was completed in fifty-two days*” (6:15). Accordingly, “*When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God*” (v. 16).

Later, Nehemiah refers to an aspect of God’s strength, which may be the most famous statement in the book. He tells the people, after the completion of the wall and a time of repentance: “*the joy of the LORD is your strength*” (8:10).

E.4) God’s opportunities

We need to remember that while Nehemiah had a favored position as cup-bearer to the Persian king, the Jews were still under political and military captivity to the Persian nation. Nehemiah could have done nothing for the welfare of the Jews without permission from his pagan

master. Accordingly, Nehemiah asked: *“If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it”* (2:5). And Nehemiah understood that, *“because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests”* (2:8).

E.5) God’s people

Obviously, Nehemiah took on a task that was far too big to accomplish on his own and God needed to provide him with skilled people to help him. Upon Nehemiah saying to the people, *“let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem”* the people *“replied, ‘Let us start rebuilding.’ So they began this good work”* (2:18).

God also provided special, qualified, trustworthy, and committed workers for Nehemiah:

I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men do. . . .

I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because these men were considered trustworthy. (7:1-2; 13:13)

E.6) God’s promises

Nehemiah was well versed with the biblical promises given the Jews. In the process of forming his resolve to rebuild Jerusalem, he recited this promise in prayer to God:

Remember the instruction You gave Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to Me and obey My commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for My Name.’” (1:8-9)

And Nehemiah claimed this promise for himself and the people, giving him some confidence that God would bless his efforts.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Father, raise up more Nehemiah's in this generation that see the great trouble Your Church is in and commit themselves to rebuilding it. And may You be glorified in their lives as You were in Nehemiah's. Let us not cower before our critics and enemies but exhibit the dedication and courage of Nehemiah.

Gauging Your Grasp

What aspects of Nehemiah's life and experience are you most impressed with and want to emulate?

Recommended Reading

- *Visioneering*, Andy Stanley (Multnomah, 1999). Very practical study of the topic of leadership vision with Nehemiah as the base text.

Publications & Particulars

¹ Regarding how and why Nehemiah pursued rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and the probable OT prophecies that prompted him, see section 14.18.B.2.

² Regarding ancient cupbearers we read:

An officer of high rank at ancient oriental courts, whose duty it was to serve the wine at the king's table. On account of the constant fear of plots and intrigues, a person must be regarded as thoroughly trustworthy to hold this position. He must guard against poison in the kings' cup and was sometimes required to swallow some of the wine before serving it. His confidential relations with a king often endeared him to his sovereign and also gave him a position of great influence.

Nehemiah (cf. 1:11) was cupbearer to Artaxerxes Longimanus and was held in high esteem by him as the record shows. His financial ability (Neh 5:8, 10, 14, 17) would indicate that the office was a lucrative one. . . . Assyrian palace reliefs show how important the office of cupbearer was in relation to that of other court functionaries.

Regarding the Persian Kingdom:

It expanded to eventually rule over significant portions of the ancient world which at around 500 BC stretched from the Indus Valley in the east to Greece, making it the biggest empire the world had yet seen. (Ref. unavailable)

Chapter 12

The Reward of Visionary Faith I

Experiencing & Pleasing God

Table of Topics

A) The Reward of Experiencing God

B) The Reward of Pleasing God

Primary Points

- There is no doubt that those who embrace the trials and tribulations of pursuing a *visionary faith* to fulfill God's commands for the advancement of His Kingdom see and experience God in ways that others will not.
- People on a mission for God have stories. Miraculous stories.
- God likes us taking some risks of faith, especially in an atmosphere where people are praying and watching, so that He has an occasion to glorify Himself. In fact, God is so eager for glory, He may even create an opportunity for it Himself.
- This principle is reflected in God's dare and promise concerning financial giving.
- Paul's encouragement against weariness was the sure hope that our hard work will result in something worth the effort.
- The fact that faith pleases God explains many of the most important questions of life (i.e. Why must I have difficulties? Why doesn't God just show Himself, etc.).
- The reason that the best *divine revelation* we currently have is a Book is because of the great value God places on faith.
- We naturally despise living by faith, but we can embrace it if we realize how much it pleases God, and how rare and temporary it is.
- Only *now* do we have an opportunity to live by faith.

A) The Reward of Experiencing God

Here, we discuss a particular reward that applies to *visionary faith*: experiencing God. Remember that a God-glorifying *visionary faith* will be bigger than you can accomplish and will require God working with you. Indeed, such tasks may involve great risk, but it is in those very things that you will see God's hand in ways you would not have otherwise. There is no doubt that those who embrace the trials and tribulations of pursuing a *visionary faith* to fulfill God's commands for the advancement of His Kingdom see and experience God in ways that others will not.

In fact, this may include what Christ is referring to in the Great Commission when He adds, "*Be sure of this: I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" (Matt 28:20). Perhaps this is a rather conditional promise specifically for those engaged in fulfilling the Great Commission.¹ It seems Christ is promising to be "*with*" such people in a special, even supernatural way. And indeed, those fulfilling the Great Commission obviously require a good deal of miraculous intervention on God's part just to bring about the necessary spiritual conversions, which we have claimed elsewhere is the greatest miracle of all.²

Indeed, in our central text from 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 we believe Paul is praying for miraculous deeds in the context of *visionary faith*. Paul recognized that our "*passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted your faith*" in order that the "*Lord Jesus will be honored*" would require God's intervening miraculous "*power*."

Accordingly, people on a mission for God have stories. Miraculous stories. Read a biography of a missionary and you will see what we mean. There is nothing like the obvious intervention of God on our behalf that draws us closer to Him and makes Him real to us. And those who are pursuing challenging, even risky *plans to fulfill God's commands* normally see such miracles more than others.

Part of the reason is that the pursuit of our *visionary faith* gives God an opportunity to glorify Himself. As noted previously, we do not attempt foolish, unnecessarily harmful things to test God. But God likes us taking some risks of faith, especially in an atmosphere where people are praying and watching, so that He has an occasion to glorify Himself. In fact, God is so eager for glory, He may even create an opportunity for it Himself.

Such an event is described in Psalm 107. The Psalm relates several instances in the lives of people that God miraculously rescued. They, "*went out on the sea in ships; they did work³ on the mighty waters*" (v. 23). Sounds kind of risky. But, "*They saw the works of the LORD, His wonderful deeds in the deep*" (v. 24). How? Through the difficulties God allowed (even caused) and His miraculous rescue from them:

For God spoke and stirred up a storm that lifted the waves high. . . in their danger their courage melted away . . . they were out of their mind.

Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distress. He calmed the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and He guided them to their desired destination.

Let them give thanks to the LORD because of His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for men. (vs. 25-31)

But many people do not need such deeds from God because they are not attempting things for God that require God. As we have discussed elsewhere: “Everyone wants a miracle, but no one wants to be in real need of one.” It is people sacrificing and risking things for God that need them and can expect them.⁴

This principle is reflected in God’s dare and promise concerning financial giving. Of course there can appear to be some risk to “*Give the whole tenth*” to God. But He says, “*Test Me in this*” and promises all sorts of divine blessing and intervention when He says:

You will see that I will throw open the floodgates of Heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit,” says the LORD Almighty. (vs. 10-11)

If this is God’s attitude toward the sacrifice of giving financially to advance His kingdom work on Earth, surely it applies to all that we would do in pursuit of our *visionary faith*. But only those who would give like this would see and experience God in the ways that He promises. The same is true for us regarding what kind of “*work of faith*” (2 Thess 1:12) we pursue for Him.

It is the blessing of seeing God work that encourages us to work. Thankfully, God gives us some promises regarding the hard work in pursuing our *visionary faith*. The Apostle Paul wrote: “*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up*” (Gal 6:9). What is Paul’s encouragement against weariness? The evidently sure hope that our hard work will result in something worth the effort.

Likewise, he wrote the Corinthians:

My dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Cor 15:58)⁵

Along the same lines we read in Proverbs:

The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied. (Prov 13:4)

The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty. (Prov 21:5)

One writer put it this way:

Whatever your challenges were today, or yesterday, or appear to be waiting for you tomorrow, remember 1 Cor 15:58 - *"your toil is not in vain in the Lord"*. If He captures all our prayers as incense, if He sees all our tears, He certainly will never let our choices of faith fail to leave an eternal mark in this world. God is pleased with our work, and the world is a better place because we are doing what we do. ⁶

B) The Reward of Pleasing God

The author of Hebrews writes:

It was by faith that Enoch was taken up to Heaven without dying. He disappeared because God took him away. This was because before he was taken, he was praised as a person who pleased God. And it is impossible to please God without faith. This is because anyone who wants to come to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. (Heb 11:5-6)

The author portrays Enoch as one who pleased God by living a life of faith. Accordingly, we read of him in Genesis:

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. (Gen 5:21-24)

While the Hebrew text of modern translations states that *"Enoch walked with God,"* the ancient Greek Septuagint text, which the author of Hebrews used, had paraphrased this expression as *"Enoch pleased God."* No doubt that all of this is true. Enoch *"walked with God"* in a relationship of faith that pleased God.

Note that during this time, while *"men began to proclaim the name of the Lord"* (Gen 4:26), there is no mention that God was physically revealing Himself to people as He did to Adam hundreds of years previously and would, evidently, to Noah. Therefore, Enoch's *"walk*

with God” was by faith, and not by sight. This is precisely why he pleased God so much. He loved and lived for a God he had not seen, which, as we will see, God takes a particular delight in.

As one studies the passage in Genesis, one notices that the text repeatedly says that all the other men from Adam to Noah simply “*lived*,” including Enoch’s son Methuselah who lived 969 years, the longest of any recorded human being. But the text does not say that Enoch “*lived*,” but that he “*walked with God*,” and it says it twice. God is no doubt making a point here that to live a life of faith, communion, and obedience to God for 365 years is much better than to simply live for many more years as Enoch’s contemporaries and own son did. To “*walk with God*” was a description only given to Enoch and Noah (cf. Gen 6:9), and which seems to communicate even more intimacy than “*walking before God*” which is used of others in Scripture.⁷ Enoch lived a life of faith, never seeing God, but obeying God, and therefore pleasing God so much that the author of Hebrews said God translated him directly to Heaven without dying.

When the author of Hebrews says “*it is impossible to please God without faith*” we know that the corollary is true as well: faith pleases God. This fact explains many of the most important questions of life. Why must I have difficulties? Why does holiness have to be such a struggle? Why doesn’t God just do a miracle and show Himself? Why does God let the devil be in charge of this world? Why wouldn’t He encourage, bless, and radically transform every Christian instantly and forever with just a brief glimpse of Him in Heaven *now*? *Because God loves faith.*

Our present interaction with God through the Scriptures and Spirit requires faith. We cannot see the God we are experiencing on a daily basis. Indeed, Peter said, “*Even though you have not seen Jesus, you love Him. And even though you do not see Jesus now, you believe in Him and greatly rejoice with a joy that cannot be put in words and is full of glory*” (1 Pet 1:8).

Likewise, the Apostle Paul said of the Christian, “*we live by faith, not by sight*” (2 Cor 5:7). Living by faith in our relationship with God essentially means that God does not directly reveal Himself to our physical senses. We do not see Him, hear Him, nor can touch Him. As we have said, *biblical faith* depends on evidence and reasons for sure, but just not the kind that comes through direct contact with our physical senses.⁸

Admittedly, not all of God’s people have had to live completely by such faith. Adam & Eve heard the Creator walking and talking (cf. Gen 3:8-13). Moses saw His backside and talked with Him face to face (Exod 33:11, 23). The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel “*saw the Lord*” (cf. Isa 6:1; Ezek 1:1). The Apostle Paul *did* have that glimpse of Heaven (2 Cor 12:1-

4). And we can envy such people if we do not understand how much faith pleases God.

The reason that the best and clearest *divine revelation* we currently have is a Book, is because of the great value God places on faith. Because we live in the Age of Faith instead of the coming Age of Sight, we do not know God as we will, nor in the manner we will. But the Age of Faith will end (cf. Rom. 8:24-25, 2 Cor. 4:18, 5:7, Heb. 11:1). While the earthly life of Christ was the ultimate *divine revelation* of God in the past and the indwelling of the Spirit in our New Nature and the provision of Scripture is such for the present, there is still to come, a revelation of God that will far surpass all of these.

But that time has not yet come. The fact is, God is not as real to us as we would like Him to be. Not even to the most spiritual and godly Christians. This is because faith is never as real as sight. Do we doubt for a moment that God was more *real* to Adam, Moses, and Isaiah than He is to us? And He was more real to them for the simple reason that they *saw* something of His Person with their human senses that very few of God's people have throughout the Church Age.

It is natural to envy such men, and unfortunately the parade of people today claiming to have seen or heard God as well does not help. Let us admit it. We despise living by faith instead of by sight. We yearn to pierce the veil that God Himself has established between us and Him and interact with Him as we are accustomed to interacting with humans. This is why contemporary Christian music is full of songs that ask God to let us see, hear, and even touch Him.⁹ Indeed, we envy the Prophets and Apostles who have, and chafe under the obligation that in this life, "*we live by faith, not by sight*" (2 Cor 5:7).

It is only when we understand how much God is pleased with faith, that we can begin to embrace it. The time will come when faith will not exist (cf. Rom 8:24-25, 2 Cor. 4:18, 5:7, Heb. 11:1). But in this age "*it is impossible to please God without faith*" (Heb 11:6). It is only *now* that we have an opportunity to live by faith. Not even Angels or demons live by faith. Only *we* have the awesome opportunity and privilege to live by faith and not by sight, hearing, or touch in our relationship with God. While we might envy the very few in human history who have seen or heard more of God's Person than we, we are reminded that Christ told such people, "*Because you have seen Me, you have believed. But God give happiness to those who have not seen and yet have believed*" (John 20:29).¹⁰

A God of the senses and a God of faith are incompatible. We cannot see, hear, or touch the God we love, serve, adore, and would die for. *And that is precisely how He wants it.* . . for now. Of course God is our Father Who knows and cares for our life, Jesus is our Friend Who will always be with us to the end of the Age of Faith, and the Holy Spirit lives

inside of us, but God intends all of these relationships to preserve the need for faith. Therefore, God Himself will rarely, if ever, reveal Himself personally in a voice, vision, etc.

Indeed, the Apostle Peter said, “*Even though you have not seen Jesus, you love Him. And even though you do not see Jesus now, you believe in Him and greatly rejoice with a joy that cannot be put in words and is full of glory*” (1 Pet 1:8). It is important to notice that the Apostle assumed that none of the multitudes of believers that he was writing to in his day *had* ever personally physically seen or heard the King. Even so, “*a joy that cannot be put in words and is full of glory*” can occur simply through faith.

The Apostle invites us to experience “*a joy that cannot be put in words and is full of glory*” without seeing, hearing, or feeling Christ. And therefore we maintain the right to claim we are still living by God-pleasing faith, not sight. This is good news for the vast majority of God’s people throughout human history who, being just as sincere, sacrificial, and spiritual as any others, have *not* encountered God with their human senses.

God decides what we need to see, hear, and feel in order to have the necessary evidence to believe what He wants us to believe, and therefore, many in the Church today need to be a lot more content with the revelation He has already provided. Isn’t “*faith . . . being certain of what we do not see*” (Heb. 11:1)? And isn’t this the faith that without which “*it is impossible to please God*” (v. 6)? In this day where experience is exalted over faith we need to be reminded that God likes it when we see, hear, and feel *nothing*, but still believe, trust, obey, and adore Him.

We do not wish to imply that biblical characters who experienced miraculous revelation, or those who might do so today, are automatically any less people of faith. Abraham, for example, experienced a great deal of miraculous revelation but is known as a man of great faith. However, such people rarely, if ever, were *seeking* such revelation. God just does it. It is those who are seeking, depending on, and constantly presuming miraculous revelation that we fear have lost the value that God places on faith.

As another writer has put it, “This road of our earthly pilgrimage is headed for a reunion [and revelation] that cannot be rushed.”¹¹ All of these things are constantly ignored by the unbiblical revelatory *isms* in our day.

Here we are reminded of something Alexander Mackie wrote many years ago in the conclusion of his study on claims to miraculous events and communication throughout Church history:

Men are eager for the supernatural. The ordinary way of morality as a school for spiritual development is often irksome. The

bringing in of the Kingdom of God through patient toil is not an undertaking which commends itself to many minds. Cataclysmic religion is far more interesting. Voices, visions, and miracles are a much more simple and attractive method of solving the problems of life than is to be found along the bare and sometimes unattractive path of duty. The lure of the presence of the supernatural is a will-o'-the-wisp that many minds follow gladly, never stopping to investigate claims or pretensions as to the reality of the supernatural. ¹²

As for us, we will “*live by faith, not by sight*” (2 Cor 5:7) because this is what God wants, this is our only opportunity to do so, we are the only beings that *can* do so, it puts a smile on the King’s face, and it makes us anticipate all the more that Day when we will see Him smiling at us with our own eyes.

In a very real sense, we cannot fail. The success of our faith will ultimately depend on God. Remember, we are attempting something that requires His intervention. If we do not accomplish what we hope for, and we did our best, it will be because for some reason God chose to not fulfill our vision. But we pursued it for Him anyway. We loved Him by taking the risks and working hard. And so we really do succeed.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, we embrace the opportunity to live by faith in this life in order to please You. While we yearn to see You, we know we are privileged even beyond angels to live by faith. Help us to live by faith and not sight as we look forward to that Day that we will live by sight forevermore.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) Why do those pursuing a *visionary faith* experience God more?
- 2) Why does faith please God?
- 3) How can this knowledge encourage us to live by faith?

Publications & Particulars

¹ D. A. Carson writes on the possible conditionality of this promise: “if not made explicitly conditional on the disciples’ obedience to the Great Commission, is at least closely tied to it.” (*Matthew* in the *Expositors Biblical Commentary*, Frank Gaebelein ed. (Eerdmans)).

² Regarding the miraculous nature of spiritual conversion see section 10.5.B.2.

³ The Hebrew is *melakah* meaning “work, occupation.” The common translation “merchant” is not necessary.

⁴ Regarding things that can increase our experience of miracles see section 10.3.C.

⁵ There is some debate as to whether these promises in 1 Corinthians 15:58 and Galatians 6:9 should be understood as for the present life or the next one. Regarding the latter, Richard Longenecker comments:

The expression *kairō idios* is probably an idiom for “at the appropriate moment,” “in due season,” or “at the proper time,” without any specification given as to what moment, season, or time is in mind. . . . a this-worldly existential future or an other-worldly eschatological future, or both. Interpreters have easily latched on to one or the other of these understandings depending on their own theological proclivities. (*Galatians*, WBC [Nelson, 1990], 282)

Barnes, MacArthur, Bruce, and Barrett seem to favor the eschatological view at the expense of the existential one. Most are non-committal including Morris, Thiselton, Fee, Cole, and Calvin.

For us, it seems Paul was alluding to real fruit in this life from our labors, just as he saw real converts, disciples, and churches raised up through his efforts. In fact, Jesus promised and expected “much fruit” from our labors on this Earth (John 15:5, 8, 16). But, because Paul is not specific, it may apply to both realms, although Paul certainly was not excluding the earthly ministry realm. Along these lines, John Stott writes:

Some incentive is certainly needed in Christian well-doing. Paul recognizes this, for he urges his readers not to ‘grow weary’ or ‘lose heart’ (cf. 2 Thess 3:13). Active Christian service is tiring and exacting work. We are tempted to become discouraged, to slack off, even to give up. So the apostle gives us this incentive: he tells us that doing good is like sowing seed. If we persevere in sowing, then ‘in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.’

If the farmer tires of sowing and leaves half his field unsown, he will reap only half the crop. It is the same with good deeds. If we want a harvest, then we must finish the sowing and be patient, like the farmer who waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it . . . ‘(Jas. 5:7). As John Brown put it: ‘Christians frequently act like children in reference to this harvest. They would sow and reap in the same day.’

If the sowing is the doing of good works in the community, what is the harvest? Paul does not tell us; but lets us to guess. But the patient doing of good in the church or community always produces good results. . . . And it will bring good to the doer as well-- not indeed salvation--but some reward in heaven for faithful service, which will probably take the form of yet more responsible service. (*The Message of Galatians* [Intervarsity, 1986], 172)

⁶ Reference unavailable.

⁷ OT scholar Victor Hamilton compares the two phrases when he writes:

Twice we are told that Enoch *walked with God*, a description applied also to Noah in 6:9. This expression may be compared to *halak* [“walk before God] which indicates the service of a loyal servant, who goes before his master (sometimes

human but mostly divine), paving the way, or who stands before his master ready to serve. Thus, Hezekiah walked before God (2 K. 20:3 par. Isa. 38:3), as did the patriarchs (Gen. 17:1; 24:40; 48:15). A bit more intimacy seems to be suggested by "walking with" as over against "walking before." "Walk with" captures an emphasis on communion and fellowship. In a number of passages, all addressed to a king or his dynasty, "to walk before God" strongly suggests obedience and subordination (1 K. 2:4; 3:6; 8:23, 25; 9:4), rather than worship and communion. (*The Book of Genesis (NICOT)* (Eerdmans, 1990), 258

⁸ For further discussion of the fact that *biblical faith* rests on evidence and reason see chapters 6.12-14.

⁹ Speaking of the exaggerated intimacy present today in Christian worship, David McLeod of Emmaus Bible College writes in a review of Jack Deere's *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*:

[Jack] Deere's discussion of "passion" for Jesus sounds a lot like the "eros piety" confronted by Anders Nygren. Eros piety, found in Greek religion, Gnosticism, and the mystery religions expresses "an appetite, a yearning desire for God which seeks Him in order to satisfy the believer's spiritual hunger by the [physical and sensual] possession and enjoyment of the divine perfections." It is seen in many choruses, which are almost romantic in quality.

The agape love of the NT is not "a longing and striving after something that man lacks and needs but a response of gratitude for something freely and bountifully given." It is a wholehearted surrender to God, whereby the believer becomes God's willing slave, content to be at His disposal, having full trust and confidence in Him.

Sensitivity and humility are needed in evaluating [modern] spiritual life teaching. I would point out, however, that the NT does not use the kind of quasi-romantic expressions that Deere uses (i.e., falling in love with Jesus). Nor does it promise the kind of immediacy of contact that he hungers for. I would suggest that we all need to remember that heaven and the kingdom come later (Acts 14:22). Today we live by faith and not by sight. (*Emmaus Journal*, "Surprised by the Power of the Spirit: A Review Article" 10:1, (Summer 2001), 146).

¹⁰ Christ's blessing on people who believed without seeing does not contradict our defense elsewhere of Thomas' request to see Jesus (cf. section 6.19.A.5).

¹¹ Reference unavailable to our regret.

¹² Alexander Mackie, *The Gift of Tongues: A Study in the Pathological Aspects of Christianity* (Doran, 1921), 258.

Chapter 13

The Reward of Visionary Faith II

Glorifying God on Earth, in Heaven, & for eternity

Table of Topics

- A) Glorifying God Now before Humans
- B) Glorifying God Now in Heaven
- C) Being glorified for all eternity

Extras & Endnotes

Primary Points

- When the *vision faith* for a homeless shelter, hospital, school, church plant or other endeavor to serve humankind is pursued in Jesus' name, and accomplished by Jesus' power, He and we are glorified.
- There is a realm of unseen beings that surround our lives and they are watching us (1 Cor 4:9). This is confirmed in Job.
- Our choices in this life either glorify God or the devil.
- Everyone wants to glorify God with the kind of *blessing* Job experienced, rather than the kind of *testing* he endured.
- How much will we love and trust God in this life? That is the most important question being answered in the Universe.
- Glory is the most precious commodity in the Universe, and both God and the devil want it. Christians are the greatest source of glory *for both* in the Universe because only we really have free will over sin and can choose who we will love. There is no greater way to reveal the worth of someone—to glorify them—than to love them. Not even God can manipulate real love. And it is especially unconditional, sincere love for God that gets Heaven and Hell's attention.
- God wants to glorify us. This glory will be awarded at the judgment seat of Christ, and then enjoyed for all eternity.

The ultimate goal and reward for all *biblical faith*, including the *visionary* kind, is the glory of God. Indeed our central text regarding *visionary faith* reads:

Because of the return of Christ, we always pray that God will think you have lived up to His commanding invitation to experience your special privilege and responsibility as a Christian. We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted your faith. Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of you, and you will be honored along with Him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 1:11-12)

All the trust, sacrifice, and obedience involved in *visionary faith* glorifies God in many ways. When and where does this glory occur? In several realms: 1) before humans now on Earth, 2) in Heaven now, and 3) in Heaven later.

A) Glorifying God Now before Humans

Jesus spoke of such earthly glory through our good deeds when He said, “*Shine your light for people to see so that they can see your good works and praise your Father in Heaven*” (Matt 5:16). It is particularly when the world sees our *empowering faith* in biblical promises and commands in the midst of extreme difficulty and trial, that God is glorified. As discussed further elsewhere, this is precisely what the Apostle Peter is referring to when he writes:

[E]ven if you suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” Instead in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Pet 3:14-15)

The context here was that Christians were being persecuted for their faith, but exhibiting great courage and “*hope*” in the midst of it. Therefore, Peter anticipates unbelievers, even their persecutors, asking them how they can have such hope in the midst of such difficulties. The answer would not be intellectual arguments for the faith as so many interpret and apply this verse.¹ The answer would be: Because I’m a Christian! I have the Holy Spirit! I know God loves me!

Visionary faith, the accomplishment of human plans to obey God’s commands, certainly glorifies God on Earth. When the *vision faith* for a homeless shelter, hospital, school, church plant or other endeavor to

serve humanity is pursued in Jesus' name, and accomplished by Jesus' power, He and we are glorified. And this has been the undeniable proof and history of Christianity in this world. Elsewhere we have recorded several encouraging testimonies of how the supernatural virtue of Christians, as they carried out a *visionary faith* for God, has greatly glorified God on Earth. ²

B) Glorifying God Now in Heaven

Unfortunately, however, many Christians confine their understanding of glorifying God to the current earthly realm. While our supernatural faith and love have the potential to glorify God on Earth, it is a harsh reality that pagans are rarely paying attention. If God's glory is confined to what mere unbelievers may grant Him, then it is limited indeed. In addition, we often cannot handle earthly glory very well, and it tempts us to pride. Thankfully, glorifying God and being glorified by God occurs more consistently, importantly, and gloriously elsewhere.

God and other beings in the spiritual realm are watching us *now*. The Apostle wrote the Corinthians:

I believe God has put us Apostles on display. Much like prisoners of war at the end of a victor's parade and condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe including Angels and people. (1 Cor 4:9) ³

Paul believed his life, struggles, and ministry were being lived out on a theatrical stage with God, Angels, and humans watching. The "people" probably refer to those on Earth instead of in Heaven. ⁴ But both God and Angels (good and bad probably) are watching from the unseen spiritual realm. We are so unaware of our surroundings, thinking that the only things that exist and affect our lives are things we can see. But there is an entire realm of unseen beings that surround our lives and they are watching us.

This theology is confirmed in Job. Notice how much both God and satan know about him when we read:

One day the members of the heavenly court came to present themselves before the LORD, and satan was with them. The LORD asked satan, "Where have you come from?"

satan answered the LORD, "I have been patrolling the Earth, watching everything that's going on."

Then the LORD asked Satan, "Have you noticed My servant Job? He is the finest man in all the Earth. He is blameless—a man of integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil."

satan replied to the LORD, “Yes, but Job has good reason to fear God. You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! (Job 1:6-10)

Both Heaven and Hell were watching Job’s life intently. What were they watching for? Love for, and faith in God. These are what our life is being evaluated on. Will we love God enough to be holy, and will we trust Him through all the difficulties thrown our way. The trials of life are simply stage props designed by God to test us, not hurt us, so that our faith and love are on display for Him, the Angels, and the demons.

Why? Because our choices in this life either glorify God or the devil. When we love and exercise faith in a God we cannot see, we give glory to God. When we sin, when we fear, when we give up, we glorify the devil. Notice how God boasts about Job to the devil:

Then the LORD asked satan, “Have you noticed My servant Job? He is the finest man in all the Earth. He is blameless—a man of integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil.” (v. 8)

Job’s fear, faith, and love for God glorified Him, even giving God an opportunity to boast to His enemy.

Then came the dare. Here is the part that makes this passage one of the most fascinating in all of human literature, let alone Scripture: satan dares God about Job’s faith and love:

satan replied to the LORD, “Job has good reason to fear [and trust and love] God. You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!” (vs. 9-11)

What is satan’s claim: “Job does not really love God, but really only loves God’s blessings. Take it away and you’ll see how much faith and love Job really has for you.” Unfortunately, the devil had a great deal of evidence for his claim. Throughout human history he had observed this very thing repeatedly with very few exceptions. Everyone’s love for and faith in God is conditional. Everyone wants to glorify God with the kind of *blessing* Job experienced, rather than the kind of *testing* he endured.

It is at this point in the biblical narrative that we might think God would simply brush off the devil’s dare. What does He care about what satan thinks. God knew Job loved Him. But God wanted the devil to know too. God wanted to embarrass the devil. God wanted to show the Angels and demons that Job really did worship Him out of His own choosing, and not just because of the blessings. And it would be Job’s unconditional love, even love in the midst of God taking everything from

him, that would make the devil's and demons' jaws drop in awe- because no one loves *them* like that. No one glorifies them like that. They are not worth that much to anyone. Only God deserves to be loved and worshipped even when He is withholding good from you.

So, we read: "*The LORD said to satan, 'All right, you may test him'*" (v. 12). This revelation is not given just so we know what happened to a man named Job thousands of years ago. It is revealed to us so that we know the same thing is happening to us. "You may test him or her" is no doubt something God has said about us. He wants to give us the opportunity to prove our faith and love for God and glorify Him before the Angels and demons who watch us.

How much will we love God in this life? That is the most important question being answered in the Universe today. This is the reason God started the whole thing. To see, to reveal, what people given real free will would do. How much would they love God back even if God allowed life to be hard sometimes?

Well, we know Job passed his test. After being informed of all he had lost we read:

Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship. He said, "I was naked when I was born, and I will be naked when I die. The LORD gave me everything I had, and the LORD has taken it all away. Praise the name of the LORD!" In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God. (vs. 20-22)

What do you think Heaven & Hell thought of that? This was the Superbowl, Olympics, and World Cup in the heavenly realms of glorifying God. Everyone was watching this one. Has any man been tested like this? And Job worshipped and He said "*Praise the name of the Lord!*"

The same theology is illustrated in the life of Daniel. Three times the Angel Gabriel appears to him and addresses him with: "*you are highly esteemed,*" "*you who are highly esteemed,*" and "*You are a man highly esteemed*" (Dan 9:23, 10:11, 19). Who was Daniel so highly esteemed by? God. This was the very reason that Gabriel said he had come to speak to Daniel (cf. 9:23). Daniel was famous in Heaven because of the faith and love for God that he exercised throughout his life while living in captivity.

We see something similar when Luke relates:

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were possessed by demons. They would say to the demons, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil

spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” (Acts 19:13-15)

In other words, it would appear that Paul was famous among demons as well.

Men like Job, Daniel, and Paul earned the esteem of God, the awe of Angels, and the fear of demons because they lived a life of love and faith.

What is the most precious commodity in the Universe? It is glory, and both God and the devil want it. And Christians are the greatest source of glory *for both* in the Universe because only we really have free will over sin and only we can really choose who we will love. There is no greater way to reveal the worth of someone—to glorify them—than to love them. Not even God can manipulate real love. And it is especially unconditional, sincere love for God that gets Heaven and Hell’s attention.

This is the most important reason to love God- to increase the amount of glory that God gets, particularly in Heaven and Hell. All of this is why our choices are so critical. Why our faith is so critical. Along these lines, Andy Stanley has written:

Pursuing a divine vision is really an act of worship. It is a declaration of our confidence in God. It is a proclamation of how important we believe his agenda to be. And God is honored. . . .

Pursuing a vision requires faith. Pursuing a great vision requires great faith. Pursuing a vision will test, stretch, and at times exhaust your faith. And while you are pulling your hair out down here, God revels in the glory he receives. While we wait and wait and wait, and trust and trust and trust, he basks in the glory reflected back to him by his faithful servants.

He glories in our willingness to take him at his word. He delights in our perseverance in the face of debilitating odds. Our faith and ensuing faithfulness bring him immense honor. ⁵

C) Being Glorified For All Eternity

God wants to share His glory. He not only wants to be glorified, but He wants to glorify us. This glory will be awarded at the judgment seat of Christ, and then enjoyed for all eternity. Accordingly, the Apostle writes that the evaluation of deeds for God will occur when “*the Lord comes*” and “*at that time each will receive their praise [glory] from God*” (1 Cor 4:5). Likewise, Paul indicates that the glory awarded at the Great White Throne (cf. Rev 20:11; Matt 25:31-33) will continue for eternity when he says: “*Our light and temporary troubles are*

producing for us a weight of glory that is far beyond comparison and will last forever” (2 Cor 4:17).

Likewise he writes: *“I have concluded that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18).*

It really matters what we do for God in this life on this Earth. It will matter for all eternity. Thus, the Apostle gives us this sobering warning:

Anyone who builds their life on the foundation of Jesus Christ can use a variety of materials like gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the Day of evaluation, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through the flames. (1 Cor 3:12-15)

Likewise, we are reminded of Paul’s words to even first century slaves:

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as if you are working for the Lord, not for people. Do this because you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. The Master you are serving is Christ. (Col 3:23-24)

The Lord is watching our hard work. He is watching us trying to fulfill His Great Commission. And ultimately, we are working for Him, not people. We seek first His pleasure, not some positive response from people. Our work is always worth it because we are doing it for our Sin-bearer and King. And He will reward us.

In fact, if you study the biblical descriptions of what happens when we are first gathered before the throne of Christ, you will notice that it would seem Christ is interested in only one thing: What did we do for Him? We might expect a celebration of His victory or our salvation, or a worship service, or instructions regarding what eternal life in the New World will be like. But none of these are described as occurring when we meet at Christ’s throne. As John saw it: *“The dead were evaluated according to what they had done as recorded in the books . . . each person was evaluated according to what they had done” (Rev 20:12-13).* And that’s about it.

There will be rewards, praise, and glory for the faith we exercised in God’s commands and promises like Job. Likewise, *“any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted your [visionary] faith” (2 Thess 1:12)* will be about the most important thing on your most important Day. What were you willing to plan and pursue in this life for the advancement of God’s Kingdom and glory? What did your *visionary*

faith include? What did you try for God, even though you did not know if it would bear the fruit you desired? In light of eternity, these are among the most important questions the Christian can ask- and hopefully answer.

It would seem Pastors will have a special evaluation and glory. Scripture indicates that we will stand before Christ *with* those entrusted to our spiritual care. The Apostle wrote: “*We know that God Who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us to be with Jesus. And God will present us to Himself together*” (2 Cor 4:14).

Do we know that? Do we know that at least part of our divine evaluation will be *together* with those we led? Will we be able to “*boast of [them] on the Day of the Lord Jesus*” (2 Cor 1:14) as Paul hoped for the Corinthian church? This was one of Paul’s burdens for the Corinthians—that they would have something to show for their life and he took a great deal of responsibility upon himself for helping them to do so (cf. 1 Cor 3:1-18).

Notice what the Apostle told the Philippian and *why*:

Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live innocent and blameless lives as children of God so you shine like stars in the universe among a crooked and perverted generation. Hold firmly to the word of life so that on the day of Christ's return, I can boast that I did not run or work for nothing. (Phil 2:14-16)

Can we say to our church what Paul said to the Thessalonians?:

Who is our hope or joy or crown of boasting? It is you in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes. This is because you are our glory and joy. (1 Thess 2:19-20)

And evidently, that “*glory and joy*” will be for eternity.

In our individualistic culture, we only think of meeting Christ and being evaluated by Him as an individual, alone with Him. That will certainly be the case: “*At that time each will receive their praise from God*” (1 Cor 4:5). But we will also be evaluated *together*. What kind of church were we? How well did we work together, and how much did we accomplish?

Part of our God-given job description is to do what we can to make that Day as glorious as possible for our people. We can help them receive more praise at the judgement seat of Christ and enjoy more eternal rewards in the New World forever and ever.

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, what greater purpose could we have than glorifying you on Earth, and in Heaven. Thank you for the opportunity we have to do this in our life. Help us to make the most of it!

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What are the three realms in which glory occurs?
- 2) How does our faith glorify God?
- 3) What is our interpretation and application of 1 Corinthians 4:9? What other biblical texts do we use to support this view? How does this concept affect our life?
- 4) What do you think our reward of glory will look and feel like in the New World?

Publications & Particulars

¹ Regarding the popular misinterpretation and application of 1 Peter 3:15 see section 5.4.B.2.

² Regarding the history of supernatural virtue in Christianity see chapters 5.9, 5.16, and 5.18.

³ “*Much like prisoners of war at the end of a victor's parade and condemned to die in the arena.*” See NLT which reflects the cultural background Paul was alluding to. “*Universe*” trans. *kosmō* which can mean “world, universe” (BAGD #3).

Albert Barnes writes of Paul's use of *theatron* “spectacle” in 1 Corinthians 4:9:

The theater, or amphitheater of the ancients was composed of an arena, or level floor, on which the combatants fought, and which was surrounded by circular seats rising above one another to a great height, and capable of containing many thousands of spectators.

Paul represents himself as on this arena or stage, contending with foes, and destined to death. Around him and above him are an immense host of human beings and angels, looking on at the conflict, and awaiting the issue. He is not alone or unobserved. He is made public; and the universe gazes on the struggle. Angels and human beings denote the universe, as gazing upon the conflicts and struggles of the apostles.

It is a vain inquiry here, whether he means good or bad angels. The expression means that he was PUBLIC in his trials, and that this was exhibited to the universe. The whole verse is designed to convey the idea that God had, for wise purposes, appointed them in the sight of the universe, to pains, and trials, and persecutions,

and poverty, and want, which would terminate only in their death. (*Barne's Notes on the NT*; available online at www.ccel.org).

Regrettably, most other commentators, while confirming Barnes' interpretation, do not comment much on this amazing statement in 1 Corinthians 4:9.

- ⁴ It is a very popular belief that deceased Christians are watching us from Heaven as well. In our opinion, there is not enough clear biblical support to be dogmatic about that, including Hebrews 12:1.

Likewise, in 1 Cor 4:9, Paul says he is being watched by the whole *cosmos* including Earth, not just Heaven. The "*Angels*" are certainly watching from Heaven, which leaves the "*men*" to be watching from Earth. Accordingly, in the next verses he speaks of being "*dishonored . . . brutally treated . . . cursed . . . persecuted . . . slandered*" and "*the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world*" (vs. 10-13) all before humans on Earth.

- ⁵ Andy Stanley, *Visioneering* (Multnomah, 1999), 63, 65.

Chapter 14

The Realization of Visionary Faith*Planning your future***Overall Objective**

Provide a process for envisioning, planning, and realizing our desires to make the most of our lives for God.

Table of Topics

- A) The Importance of Planning
- B) Statements of Your Faith
- C) Segmentation of Your Roles
- D) Setting of Your Goals for Your Roles
- E) Strategies to Accomplish Your Goals
- F) Schedule Your Strategies
 - F.1) Record Priority Habits
 - F.2) Record Priority Goals
 - F.3) Create Your Calendar
- G) Seek God Weekly
- H) Stand by Your Noble Plans

Extras & Endnotes

A) The Importance of Planning

Throughout *Visionary Faith* we have been meditating on these words of Paul to the Thessalonians:

Because of the return of Christ, we always pray that God will think you have lived up to His commanding invitation to experience your special privilege and responsibility as a Christian.

We pray that through His power you will accomplish any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted your faith.

Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of you, and you will be honored along with Him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 1:11-12)

As we have demonstrated in the previous chapters, the Apostle Paul is challenging these believers to pursue *“any passionate resolve to do good, and every action prompted your faith.”* He is encouraging them to make a *“resolve,”* a decision, about what specifically they want to do for God. And then to pursue human plans to obey God’s biblical commands, which is a *visionary faith*.

It is easy to simply read of these things, but down this book and go on with life. But God wants you to stop and make some decision. What are you going to do for God and how are you going to do it? Answering such questions will require the hard work of planning. In fact, the exercises offered in this chapter may require several weeks to complete, but the plans and convictions that will be produced by the process will be worth it.

We have already discussed Paul’s warning that Christians have a God-given responsibility over the outcome of their life. The Apostle wrote: *“On the Judgment Day, the value of a person’s work for God will be revealed.”* Which is why he said, *“Everyone needs to be very careful how they build”* (1 Cor 3:10, 13). In the same passage Paul described himself as a *“wise master builder”* (v. 10). Simply put, the Apostle is talking about *planning*. It is impossible to be a *“wise master builder”* or to carefully build anything, especially a life, without planning. The Apostle Paul was a planner (cf. 2 Cor 1:17) and so should we.

A primary reason people do not live up to their full God-given potential is a lack of planning. They never invest the work and thought needed to actually assess what God is expecting of them and plan their life to pursue and fulfill it. They believe making the most of their life is God’s responsibility. On the contrary, God says: *“Be very careful how you live. Do not be a fool but a wise person who is making the most of*

every opportunity God gives them” (Eph 5:15-16). These things are our responsibility, not God’s. Your whole life is the biggest opportunity God gives you. What you do with the rest of your life is primarily up to you.

Again, who we are is God’s gift to us. What we become is our gift to Him. Let us plan and build wisely. Of course, God has final say in what occurs in our life, and all planning is subject to Him. But God gives us much more freedom and responsibility than many think to “*Be very careful how you live . . . making the most of every opportunity*” (Eph 5:15-16) including the opportunity of our life.

Some would object to long term planning by citing Christ who said, “*Do not worry about tomorrow because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own*” (Matt 6:34). Note that Christ said we are not to “worry” about the future. He said nothing about planning our future.

We must plan. As noted above, the outcome of our life is largely dependent on what we decide and pursue. God has given us our life as an unshaped lump of clay. Because of God’s expectation for us to create something with our life, we must recognize our responsibility to plan. Great creations do not happen haphazardly and by chance. They are thought out carefully. So it is with your life. Which is why this chapter is devoted to some exercises to help you do this very thing.

This process is divided into the following seven steps:

- 1) Statements of Your Faith
- 2) Segmentation of Your Roles
- 3) Setting of Your Goals for Your Roles
- 4) Strategies to Accomplish Your Goals
- 5) Schedule Your Strategies
- 6) Seek God Weekly
- 7) Stand by Your Noble Plans

It is through such a process that we practically embrace our responsibility to take charge of our life and make it the most for God. This is how we “*make the most of every opportunity*” including our life (Eph 5:15). This is how we make the most of our eternity.

We must plan wisely, but we should also plan big. Any plan worthy of glorifying God will be a big plan. Considering our God-given position as children and servants of God, our purpose of glorifying God, and the power of God in us, we should be planning big things. The Apostle wrote the Ephesian church: “*All glory to God, Who is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ask or imagine through the power at work within us*” (Eph 3:20).

God wants us to think bigger than ourselves in order to envision and accomplish something that will glorify Him. As the Prophet said, “*The noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands*” (Isa 32:8).

It does not glorify God to make ordinary plans for our life, but extraordinary ones. Along these lines, Dr. Malphurs writes:

In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus challenged a small band of itinerant, non-classically trained disciples to reach their world with the gospel. As you examine the scope of Jesus's Great Commission from its first proclamation after the resurrection, through the book of Acts, and on to today, you quickly realize that he was a person of no small vision. He was the visionary of visionaries.

Consequently, visionary pastors should not hesitate to think big. Do not let current realities constrict your dreaming. Someone has said, "Make no small plans, for they have not the power to stir the souls of men."¹

B) Statements of Your Faith

We have already noted a perspective that is helpful to keep in mind: What we have and who we are is God's gift to us. What we do and who we become is our gift to God. We will only live who we believe we are. Our identity will determine our vision, and what we pursue in this life. What we believe about being a son (or daughter) of God will determine what we do as a servant of God. It is what we believe God has given us and who He has made us that empowers us to serve God. It is our convictions on God's doctrines and promises that enable us to consistently obey His commands.

Accordingly, the place we must begin is with our foundational beliefs about God, ourselves, and our life. We need to know who we are before we can pursue our purpose.

There are 5 areas in which we need to develop a statement of faith. What we believe about our: 1) Position, 2) Purpose, 3) Possessions, 4) Priorities, and 5) Problems. It is helpful to articulate our beliefs in these areas and have Scripture that relates to each one of them. *"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ"* (Rom 10:17). What words of God enlighten, enforce, and encourage you in who you are in Christ and what you want to do for Him? These become what many have called our "life verses." As Moses said of the words of Scripture: *"They are not just idle words for you—they are your life"* (Deut 32:47). And as Jesus quoted Moses: *"Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD"* (Matt 4:4). When the word of God strengthens our faith and encourages our hearts we are experiencing it as our "life" and what we "live on."

Let's revisit these different areas in which we need statements of faith. Our God-given *position* defines who we are. This is summed up

in Scripture as being a son (or daughter) of God. As noted in chapter 1 this is the highest position a human can have. And the blessings of having God as our Father are immense and our faith in them is a foundation of how we will live. What statements communicate *who* God has made you? What statements describe what the Bible says about your relationship with God? What biblical doctrines and promises remind you of this?

Our God-given *purpose* defines what we are to do. It guides us in all the decisions we make, and the motives for which we do everything in our life. The Bible tells us that our overall purpose is to glorify and please God. What Scriptures remind us of this overall guideline for everything we decide and do? What does the Bible say about why God has us living on this Earth?

Our God-given *possessions* remind us of what we have to serve God with. What has God given us on this Earth? These include the virtues and gifts of the Spirit, our time, our money, and relationships. Here we are looking for Scriptures that remind us of these gifts from God.

Our God-given possessions indicate our God-given *priorities*. These are the responsibilities and roles that come from the gifts God has given us and we must be faithful with. What Scriptures remind us and encourage us in these God-given roles?

Finally, we need promises and God-given reminders regarding our unique *problems* with living for and serving God. What particularly difficult struggles do we have in believing God about our position, trusting God about our possessions, and obeying God in our purpose and priorities? Perhaps there are health problems, money problems, or spiritual struggles, all for which again we need biblical promises and instruction for our encouragement.

In **Appendix A** see an example of Statements of Faith. Then write your own somewhere you can keep them and pray over them regularly.

C) Segmentation of Roles

Based on our God-given responsibilities, we can recognize specific God-given roles such as being a son of God, a servant of God, a husband, father, and worker. These are the categories in which we need to see our life, so that we can plan how we will “*make the most of every opportunity*” (Eph 5:15).

D) Setting of Goals for Roles

This is perhaps the most important part of “*making the most of every opportunity*,” and therefore our life. This is where God gives us permission to use the imagination He gave us and to envision what we want to create with the life He has given us. He has decided our position, purpose, possessions, and resulting roles and responsibilities in our life. But what we do in those God-given roles is up to us. What we do to strengthen our relationship with God, to be a better servant of God, and what kind of spouse, parent, or worker we will be is up to us. We need to imagine what we want in these areas so that we are aiming high in them, instead of simply not aiming at all.

The Apostle put it this way:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. . . . Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air (1 Cor 9:24, 26).

And yet many people live “*aimlessly*” because they do not take the time to plan the aspects of their life that they have control of. Spend some time thinking about this. Don’t worry about the fact that your goals (and even roles) will change over time. What would you like God to help you do in the different roles of your life. Remember, do not settle for goals that you think you can do in your own strength. God wants you to exercise the faith you have and dream about what you could do with God’s help. They need to be goals that seem realistic to you, but also challenging and needing God’s help and intervention to accomplish.

Even if you work 40-60 hours a week in your occupation and the tasks there are dictated for you, you can still develop some God-glorifying goals for this time (cf. Col 3:23-24).

As you think about different strategies to accomplish your goals for each role, assign a frequency or a due date to them.

E) Strategies for Accomplishing Goals

Now think about the steps, habits, and tasks *you* can do in pursuit of your goals. What investments of time, money, talents, work, etc. will be needed to “*make the most*” of pursuing the goals you have for your God-given roles, all for His glory.

In developing your strategies, determine a needed frequency for habits and a desired due date for goals.

See Appendix B for examples of the previous three activities: Segmentation of Roles, Setting Goals for Roles, Strategies for Accomplishing Goals. Then write your own conclusions on these steps somewhere you can keep them and pray over them regularly.

F) Schedule Your Strategies

Here is where the whole process of “*making the most of every opportunity*” starts becoming a reality. This is where you put the plans for your life in place. Even if you work 40-60 hours a week in your occupation and the tasks there are dictated for you, you still normally have 5 evenings and 2 whole days each week that is yours to create with and make the most of.

As we schedule our life, we should remember that God separated human time into God-ordained segments, and even He scheduled His initial creative work in the form of a day and a week. We read, for example: “*God called the light “day,” and the darkness He called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day*” (Gen 1:5). It is interesting to note that when God created the Universe in a week, He focused on one thing each day. Accordingly, based on the freedom our schedule gives us, we might consider the same strategy as we schedule our life. Perhaps we can even give a theme to each day of the week that helps us accomplish one of our goals.

We noted above that God did His creation work in one week, or 6 days. He then divided the weeks by commanding and practicing a 7th day of worship, rest, reflection, and relaxation. A week is a very important time element in God’s creation and our life as well. And what we do for recreation to renew us spiritually, emotionally, and physically is especially important.

In addition, when God created the Universe, He said, “*Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years*” (Gen 1:14). Accordingly, sunrise and sunset mark off a day. The phases of the moon mark off a month. And the courses of both mark off generally 3 month seasons and a year. Accordingly, it seems God would have us think of our own time within these created segments and schedule our life according to them.

F.1) Record Priority Habits

To complete the scheduling task first review the Strategies you determined as illustrated in **Appendix B**. Note any consistent habits you determined were necessary with their needed frequency. Record these in preparation for developing your schedule. See example in **Appendix C**.

F.2) Record Priority Goals

Next, review again the Strategies you determined as illustrated in **Appendix B**. Determine specific tasks and goals you need to accomplish and note the due time that you assigned. Use the worksheet in **Appendix D**.

F.3) Create Your Calendar

Now you are ready to schedule your life in 3 basic segments: Annually, Monthly, and Weekly.

First, transfer the weekly and monthly Priority Habits that you determined based on the example in **Appendix C** to a calendar. Secondly, transfer any goals determined in the worksheet in **Appendix D** to a calendar as well.

G) Seek the Lord Weekly

The weekend or two you might spend planning how to make the most of your life can be an exhilarating experience. But that fire will surely die out if it is not stoked on a regular basis. It is recommended that once a week you spend some time with God praying and thinking about your position, purpose, possessions, priorities, and problems. This is the time to get refueled and encouraged by your “life verses” on these matters and recommit to pursuing God’s glory and your dreams for your roles and goals. It may also be a time to evaluate your goals, strategies, and schedule. In particular, planning the week ahead would be especially important.

A weekly time will help you maintain your plan for making the most of your life. But there should be periodic, maybe quarterly times to review your plan in more detail. And again, these weekly and quarterly times with God need to be scheduled.

There are certain questions you can address and items to pray about in order to make the most of your Weekly Time With God. See **Appendix E** for suggestions.

H) Stand by Your Noble Plans

God said through the Prophet Isaiah: “*The noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands*” (32:8). God thinks “*a noble man makes noble plans.*” The Hebrew means generous, or even “large-hearted” plans.² This is what He is expecting of us. Make plans, and

make them noble ones, worthy of glorifying Him. But it is not enough to plan.

“By noble deeds he stands.” The Hebrew word means literally to “arise,” as in standing up, but has many varied connotations. It can mean to ascend to, or be established in, a position, accomplish a task or goal, particularly to fulfill a promise. Likewise it refers to commitment and persistence. God is saying that a noble, “large-hearted” man rises to nobility, and makes it a reality by his persistent “*deeds*” in pursuit of his noble, “large-hearted” plans.

What we read in James regarding the life of faith that Abraham lives, is certainly true of *visionary faith*: “*You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did*” (Jms 2:22). Trust and seek God for the diligence and strength to be faithful to do the “*noble deeds*” necessary to fulfill your “*noble plans*” for your God, family, occupation, and friends.

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father in Heaven, help us to “make the most of every opportunity” (Eph 5:15) in our life by carefully planning our life and diligently carrying out our plans as you grant us the strength and opportunities to do so. We thank you that a fruit of the Spirit is “self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7) for this we will need for sure.

Publications & Particulars

¹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning* (Baker, 2005), 155-156.

² Regarding the word “*noble*” in Isaiah 32:8, Barnes notes:

This seems also to have the force of a proverbial expression. The word ‘liberal’ means generous, noble, large-hearted, benevolent; a man of large views and of public spirit; a man above covetousness, avarice, and self-seeking; a man who is willing to devote himself to the welfare of his country, and to the interests of his fellow-men. (*Notes on the Old Testament*; online at www.ccel.org)

Appendix A
My Statements of Faith
Example

My Position <i>What describes my relationship with God?</i>	
Statements	Scripture
I am a chosen son of Almighty God.	Jer 31:3; Eph 1:5; 1 John 3:1
I will never be rejected by my Father. He always forgives me and has compassion on me. I am secure and accepted.	Ps 103:2-17; Eph 1:4-14
I am never alone- God is always with me and watching me. I have a great friend.	Gen 28:15; Matt 6:4; John 15:14-15)
God has already made me a very important and valuable person because of who I am, not what I do.	Col 3:1-4; Eph 1:3-14
My Father will bless me and is for me.	Isa 30:18; Rom 8:31-34
I will live with my Father in a perfect paradise for eternity. Nothing can change that.	Ps 16:11; Rev 21:1-7
My Purpose <i>Why does God have me living on this Earth?</i>	
Statements	Scripture
I am a chosen servant of the King	Isa 41:9-10; John 15:8, 16
God chose me to glorify Him	John 17:1)
My choices glorify Him	2 Thess 1:11-12
God, Angels, demons, and people on Earth are watching me and giving me an opportunity to glorify God.	1 Cor 4:9-10; Dan 10:19
God will reward me for everything I do for Him.	Matt 25:21; Rev 21:1-7
My Possessions <i>What has God given me on this Earth?</i>	
Statements	Scripture
I am powerful through the Holy Spirit	2 Tim 1:7; 1 Cor 12:7, 11
I have Jesus Christ living in me	2 Cor 13:5; Rom 8:10; Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17; Col 1:27
The Spirit gives me the power to supernaturally love people	Eph 5:1-2

God gave me a wife who loves me	Prov 18:22; Prov 31:10-12
God gave me children who love God	Ps 127:3-5
God gave me parents who love me	1 Thess 3:9
God gave me friends who love me	Prov 20:6
God gave me time on this Earth	Ps 139:16
God gave me an occupation	Jms 1:17
God gives me money	Matt 6:32-33
God gives me prayer	John 14:13-14

My Priorities

What are my responsibilities based on my possessions?

Statements	Scripture
The outcome of both my life and eternity greatly depends on my choices.	Eph 5:15-17
God expects me to be faithful with what He has given me.	1 Cor 4:2
It is my responsibility to live in the power of the Spirit.	Gal 5:16
It is my responsibility to help my wife grow spiritually	Eph 5:25-28
It is my responsibility to teach my children to love God and people.	Eph 6:4
It is my responsibility to honor my father and mother	Eph 6:2-3
It is my responsibility to be faithful with my spiritual gifts	1 Pet 4:10
It is my responsibility to do the very best at my occupation	Col 3:23-24
It is my responsibility to be sacrificial and faithful with my money	Malachi 3:7-11
It is my responsibility to care especially for widows and orphans	Jms 1:27
It is my responsibility to pursue some sort of recreation that energizes me.	Exod 20:8-11; 1 Tim 6:17

My Problems

What struggles do I have that hinder me in pleasing & serving God?

Statements	Scripture
Praying consistently	Ps 145:19; 1 John 5:14-15; 1 Pet 5:7; Eph 6:11, 18
Attempting too much	Matt 11:28-30
Being faithful with roles that seem insignificant to me.	Luke 16:10
Being faithful with pursuing my plans.	Isa 32:8; Prov 21:5

Appendix B
My Roles, Goals, & Strategies
Example

Roles	Goals & Outcomes	Strategies & Habits
1 Son of God	1) Not worrying about anything	Pray about my worries at the beginning of each day.
	2) Having an eternal perspective on life	Read books on this topic.
	3) Recognize any feelings of discontentment, envy, guilt, or anything else that would indicate my identity is not in being God's son.	Monitor this in My Weekly God Time. Review my "life verses" on my position.
	4) Do not let the Harlot win.	Evaluate this area in My Weekly God Time.
2 Servant of God	1) Recognize feelings of boredom, or lacking a sense of direction.	Evaluate this in My Weekly God Time and review "life verses" if necessary.
	2) Be faithful in prayer	Pray over my position, purpose, possessions, priorities, and problems during Weekly God Time
		Pray with spouse in the evening.
	3) Ensure that I feel hardness toward no one and compassion for everyone	Evaluate this in My Weekly Time With God and forgive people if necessary.
	4) Be more balanced in keeping my priorities	Review my priorities and schedule in my God Time
	5) Be a good steward of my money by being generous, having savings, and providing for needs	Review budget with spouse once a month
3 Husband	1) Ensure my wife feels adored.	Know her love language and do it.
		Spend time with her at the end of each day

Roles	Goals & Outcomes	Strategies & Habits
		Pray with her at the beginning of each day
		Have a weekly date
		Make sure any house projects get done.
	2) Ensure my wife has a good relationship with her children.	Discuss at weekly date
	3) Counsel and encourage my wife in an area of struggle	Do this at our weekly date
	4) Keep my wife informed of my life	Discuss at weekly date
4 Father	1) Pray daily for my children	Evening prayer with my spouse
	2) Control my toddlers	Focus some time to establish my authority with discipline
		Agree with spouse on clear and simple expectations
	3) Train my children in God's ways	Agree with spouse on clear and simple expectations
	4) Have a friendship with my teens	Schedule weekly dates
		Schedule individual trips
	5) I will never be angry at my children	Participate in what they do
5 Job	1) Col 3:23-24	Evaluate in Weekly God Time how I can perform job better.
	2) Share love and truth with lost workmates	Pray for workmates in Weekly God Time.
6 Church	1) Attend Sunday service with my family & discuss the message.	Schedule on Sundays
	2) Treat my small group like family	
	3) Give a tithe	
	4) Serve in a ministry	

Appendix C
My Priority Habits
Example

Role	Habit	Frequency
Son of God	Prayer	Daily
Son of God	My Weekly Time With God	Weekly
Servant of God	Ministry at church	Weekly
Servant of God	Weekly small group fellowship	Weekly
Husband	Time with wife at end of day	Daily
Husband	Pray with wife in the morning	Daily
Husband	Date night	Weekly
Husband	Home/auto maintenance	Every other week
Husband	Discuss budget with wife	Monthly
Husband	Trips with wife	Trimester
Husband	Plan budget with wife	Annually
Father	Family devotional time	Daily
Father	Discussions with boys	Daily
Father	Date with child	Weekly
Father	Family night	Weekly
Father	Family ministry	Weekly
Father	Trip with child	Annual
Father	Family vacation	Annual

Appendix D

My Priority Goals

Worksheet

Review your Strategies and note any priority goals needed to accomplish the goals for your roles. Assign a due time for these goals as follows:

- This week
- This month
- Within 3 months
- This year
- Next year
- Next 2-3 years

[illegible]

Appendix E
My Weekly Time With God
Suggestions

- 1) Review and pray about a section of your Statements of Faith. Are there any changes to be made?
- 2) Review and pray about one or two of my Roles and its accompanying Goals. What changes or improvements can be made this week? What needs to be scheduled this week to accomplish the Goals for my Roles?
- 3) Review your schedule for the week and think about how to “*make the most of every opportunity*” (Eph 5:16) or scheduled activity.
- 4) Pray about things that concern you about the week.
- 5) Ask for God’s blessing on aspects of the week.
- 6) Determine what you will do for the “free time” you have.