

LESSON 1

Developing Vision

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:1–3). In the beginning, God had a plan. Before God ever acted in creation, He knew what He was going to do. It is comforting to know our God plans ahead. Read His words in Isaiah 46:9–10, “Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.”

God is our example. He has taught us the principle of planning ahead. The Bible is clear—we are to have a vision of where God is leading us if we hope to achieve His best. Few people are more dangerous than those who have no idea about where they are headed or how they plan to get there. They wander aimlessly through life wasting time and non-renewable resources in a futile pursuit of it. It represents a destination they will never visit because they have not properly prepared themselves.

The great achievers of the Bible were given visions from God that propelled them through life. The visions guided their steps and helped them make important life decisions. For example, Abraham’s vision guided him toward “the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10). Where did Abraham obtain this vision? God gave it to him at a critical intersection of his life.

In this lesson, let us agree and pray that the Lord will break down any barriers that could inhibit you from achieving the victorious life God has for you. God has great plans for you. He was communicating divine truths when He said, “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the LORD” (Isaiah 55:8). Pray now for the Lord to open your heart and mind to His ways.

LESSON OUTLINE

- A Biblical View of Vision
- People of Vision in the Bible
- The Power of Prayer in Developing Vision
- The Support of Vision in Daily Life
- Practical Steps to Capture God's Vision

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. *Describe what vision is.*
2. *Identify biblical examples of people of vision.*
3. *Explain the relationship between vision and prayer.*
4. *Describe the benefits of having vision.*
5. *Name steps to developing vision in your life.*

A Biblical View of Vision

Objective 1:

Describe what vision is.

One of the saddest portions of Scripture is found in Lamentations 2:9, "And her prophets no longer find visions from the LORD." The result of leaders not having a vision from God is deadly, for "where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18 KJV). Leaders without direction are ineffective. At worst, they lead people to ruin.

So what is vision, and how is it defined in the Bible? How do you know if you have a vision from God or just an idea? A vision from God is rarely discovered by an appointed visioning committee or on the second day of a three-day lakeside retreat. Some people spend weeks or months or even years in prayer and fasting, seeking God

to reveal His direction for their lives or for the church. Following are some indications of a God-given vision.

- A God-given vision puts a song in your heart that is a constant reminder of God's will for your life.
- A God-given vision gives assurance that God is your true partner.
- A God-given vision is the North Star of your life. The North Star is a star that remains stationary as the earth turns on its axis. The North Star is positioned very nearly over true north, that is, the earth's north pole. People lost in the dark use the North Star for guidance.
- A God-given vision compels you to speak and act upon it. The apostle Paul exclaimed, "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Few people are willing to pay the price for God's unique direction and vision for their lives. What is the price? The price is everything—total commitment to the Lord. And what makes a God-given vision so extraordinary? A God-given vision is distinctive; it is something that would not have surfaced by itself. A God-given vision is almost always given to one person, and that person is required by God to share it and follow it through to completion. The God-given vision belongs to no one other than God. Hence, it is sacred.

People of Vision in the Bible

Objective 2:

Identify biblical examples of people of vision.

Time after time God has raised up individuals with incredible vision at critical times in the lives of His covenant people. God loves us and will not leave us without a witness. Let us look at several people of faith to whom God gave His vision.

Isaiah's Vision

In his vision from God, Isaiah reports, "Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for'" (Isaiah 6:6–7). Writing on a wall of a church in England states: "A vision without a task is but a dream; a task without a vision is a drudgery; a vision and a task are the hope of the world." Isaiah lived in a decadent society; wickedness and sin were open for all to see. Something needed to be done. God saw the heart of Isaiah and poured into him a vision for revival of righteousness. The combination of seeing the need to reach a wicked society and receiving a powerful vision from God prompted Isaiah's response, "'Here am I. Send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8).

Many people see the need, but few acknowledge the call and commissioning from God to get the work done. A clear, powerful vision from God empowers dedicated individuals to step out of their comfort zone and into the work of God.

Jacob's Vision from God

Jacob's vision of God resulted in his name change and in his hip's dislocation. Genesis 32:31 records, "The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip." Jacob had been a manipulator. He spent much of his life trying to have the world revolve around him. But God had a better plan for him.

Jacob's life changed because of a crisis. Years earlier Jacob had cheated his brother Esau out of a critical paternal blessing. And Esau vowed to kill Jacob for what he had done. Jacob fled and did not return home for more than 20 years. Finally, the day came when Jacob had no choice but to face his brother. Jacob had not heard from him in all the intervening years and, for all he knew, Esau's anger, bitterness, and murderous intentions still smoldered. A confrontation was impending, and Jacob was gripped with fear.

In this crisis, God appeared in seeming human form and wrestled with Jacob. Jacob refused to let go of his Challenger until He blessed him. Something changed that day, and Jacob was never the same. God changed his name and gave him a vision that transformed his life. Jacob then went from being a trickster and deceiver to being a faithful follower of God. From that point on he would walk with a limp as a reminder of his encounter with God. In light of this encounter, Bob Mumford writes, “Beware of the Christian leader who does not walk with a limp.”

Paul’s Vision from God

Names given in biblical times had much to say about a person’s character, prophetic calling, or particular circumstances at the time of his or her birth. For instance, the New Testament Saul was named after Israel’s first king, a man who lived over a thousand years before the time of Christ, and who fought against Israel’s enemies with great valor. Much like his namesake, the New Testament Saul was a fighter. Prior to his conversion, he fought against the church with all his might. He felt that early Christians were subversive and a danger to the Jewish religion and nation that he dearly loved.

Saul’s encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus changed his life dramatically (see Acts 9). There, Saul received a vision from God that redirected his efforts and restructured his goals. He went from being a Jewish zealot to being the apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people). He came to love those he once hated. Later, he penned the words, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

At some point Saul began to use his Latin name, Paul—familiar in Roman culture. This name change showed Paul’s desire to identify as closely as possible with the people he longed to reach for Christ.

The Power of Prayer in Developing Vision

Objective 3:

Explain the relationship between vision and prayer.

What do you do if God has not spoken to you or given you a dramatic spiritual vision? A serious student of the Bible quickly discovers that prayer and fasting work. When a person decides to do things God's way, the first step will be prayer. Sometimes we pray for help, without even knowing the best course of action to take. For Spirit-filled believers, praying in the Spirit is our lifeline to heaven. The apostle Paul taught, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26). The Holy Spirit, who knows our heart and deepest needs, makes intercession for us. What a blessing to pray in our prayer language and touch God's throne. In those moments we tap the vast resources of heaven that await our earnest petition.

Indeed, real answers require sincere pursuit. Paul wrote of Jesus, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). God's treasures are hidden from the casual observer; therefore, they must be sought out. In our moments of prayer, God reveals our callings and the paths He has chosen for us. Most of these revelations would have been missed had we not prayed with conviction and passion.

Deep revelations from God will cost you everything. God's guidelines for obtaining divine revelation include praying and fasting. James writes, "You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2-3). Consider the following: Nehemiah fasted and God revealed himself as Deliverer (Nehemiah 1:4). David

fasted and God protected him (Psalm 35:13). Daniel fasted and God revealed hidden treasure (Daniel 9:3). Cornelius fasted and God revealed a whole new way of life (Acts 10:30). If you seriously want to receive vision from God, praying and fasting can help to clarify God's best for you.

Though many believe that there is some kind of mysterious secret to finding a vision from God, a sincere student of God's Word will soon discover the truth that Paul writes of in Ephesians 1:17–19:

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength.

The word “enlightened” is the Greek word *photizo*, which means to shed rays, to shine or to brighten up, to illuminate, or to make to see. God wants you to see as He sees. He wants to enlighten you. Vision from God is interwoven with prayer. They are as one. As you pray and fast, the vision for your life will come.

The Support of Vision in Daily Life

Objective 4:

Describe the benefits of having vision.

“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint” (Proverbs 29:18). Oswald Chambers (1995) writes,

When once we lose sight of God, we begin to be reckless, we cast off certain restraints, we cast off praying, we cast off the vision of God

in little things, and begin to act on our own initiative. If we are eating what we have out of our own hand, doing things on our own initiative without expecting God to come in, we are on the downward path, we have lost the vision. Is our attitude today an attitude that springs from our vision of God? Are we expecting God to do greater things than He has ever done? Is there a freshness and vigour in our spiritual outlook?

There are at least seven benefits of having a vision from God to guide your life:

1. A vision from God will keep you in the plan of God. The vision from God is a restraint, but with promise.
2. A vision from God provides direction for decision-making. When you know where you are going, you do not usually get lost. The vision quickly rules out unnecessary answers. It narrows the options and strengthens the decisions.
3. A vision from God provides handles for others to grasp. As others hear your vision, they will choose to associate with you and provide a support team. Your vision becomes their rally point. Unity of purpose is vital for the success of any organization or ministry.
4. A vision from God helps you to make needed changes to the methods you are using to accomplish goals. As has been stated so often, methods change, but the message of Christ must remain the same. When the vision is clear, leaders are free to discover creative disciplines to reach a changing populace.
5. A vision from God encourages accountability, candidness, and debate. No one person has all the answers. Indeed, the Lord often brings into our lives people with talents or skills that are superior to our own to strengthen our weaknesses. A good leader understands what God is doing and does

everything possible to fulfill his or her role in the Body.

6. A vision from God provides a strong sense of assurance and certainty. Noah had heard from God, so when the critics came, he stood firm in the vision God had placed in his heart. Today, some leaders have admitted that it was the personal call of God and a God-given vision that helped them through difficult situations.
7. A vision from God provides a measuring tool that will enable you to gauge your progress. When you see where you are headed, you more clearly see the movement you are making toward completion. Jesus knew His destination while He was on the Cross. He encouraged the repentant thief, “today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

There are many more outstanding benefits to having a clear vision from God. Begin now to pursue His revelation for your life.

Practical Steps to Capture God’s Vision

Objective 5:

Name steps to developing vision in your life.

The Bible is a living document that contains examples of real people achieving impossible goals by the grace and provision of God. When you read about these great men and women, their lives seem so contrary to the civilization in which they lived. Why is that? The Bible makes it clear that “they were aliens and strangers on earth” (Hebrews 11:13). God’s people will never be totally comfortable on earth. We were made for better things, for higher purposes.

Even in modern times, a Christian’s life often seems out of sync with the rest of the world. For some Christians, this is disconcerting. They struggle with being accepted by their community. They want to appear normal by the world’s standards but also hold on to the

spiritual truths. This leads to a compromised testimony and a defeated spiritual existence. But for the spiritually wise, God's will is desired above human comfort.

The purposes of God are to be sought after intentionally. If you desire to receive vision from God, you must put yourself in a position to receive it. How do we get into position to receive God's vision for our lives? Consider these three practical steps.

Step #1: Persistence

Jesus taught us how to find His vision for our lives: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). This Scripture speaks of persistence, which is godly determination of the highest order. You must have a passion for God beyond normal. The apostle Paul put it this way, "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). Paul knew where he was headed, and nothing would deter him.

Step # 2: Total Commitment to God

Entrust yourself to God beyond any commitment you have ever made. He wants to pour His sacred vision into an undistracted and qualified vessel. Renew your passion for God, and be holy and sanctified for the Master's use. Paul advised young Timothy, "If a man cleanses himself . . . , he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" (2 Timothy 2:21).

Step #3: Boldness

Proverbs 28:1 tells us that "the righteous are as bold as a lion." The vision of God is given to the bold and courageous. Paul and Barnabas were bold in the

ministry because their callings were sure. “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2–3). The vision was clear; the church was in unity, the assignment was specific, so they could act in boldness and favor. Please do not hesitate to place yourself in position to receive all that God has for you. Your sincere efforts are worth every sacrifice.

Conclusion

What happens next becomes your personal decision. A door is opened to you, and your Savior calls. Do you want to hear from God? Do you want to seek Him with your whole heart? Is it the passion of your heart to receive a clear vision from God? He is willing and able to meet your expectations, and exceed every dream of your heart. Paul affirms that God is “able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20). Abraham stepped out; Noah built; Isaiah spoke; Daniel took a stand; and Cornelius made the necessary changes to please God. What will you do now?

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE VERSES TO MEMORIZE

Proverbs 29:18

Isaiah 55:8

Matthew 7:7–8

Romans 8:26

2 Corinthians 5:17

Ephesians 3:20

SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

1. *The principle of planning*
 - a) *originated from God.*
 - b) *is pointless, for life will simply happen.*
 - c) *has no basis in Scripture.*
2. *One main driving force for the success of great achievers in the Bible is that they*
 - a) *had natural wisdom and drive that was better than their peers.*
 - b) *knew how to build focus committees and coalitions.*
 - c) *were led by a God-given vision.*
3. *According to the lesson, the God-vision belongs to*
 - a) *the church.*
 - b) *God.*
 - c) *the recipient of the vision.*
4. *Name three elements of a vision from God.*
 - a) *A God-given vision is always divisive.*
 - b) *A God-given vision compels the recipient to act upon it.*
 - c) *The God-given vision is unclear and burdensome.*
5. *Jacob's vision of God resulted in*
 - a) *the scorching of his lips.*
 - b) *his being the apostle to the Gentiles.*
 - c) *his name change and hip dislocation.*
6. *Three people that the Bible specifically says had a vision from God are*
 - a) *Pilate, Hophni, and Nimrod.*
 - b) *Theophilus, Thomas, and Zerubbabel.*
 - c) *Paul, Isaiah, and Jacob.*
7. *The idea that "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26) suggests that the Holy Spirit*
 - a) *keeps us awake while we pray.*
 - b) *knows what we need better than we do ourselves.*
 - c) *is not interested in what we pray.*

8. *The main thing you can do as you seek a vision from God is to*
 - a) *read many books on vision.*
 - b) *earnestly fast and pray, and seek the face of God.*
 - c) *form a focus group of interested adults.*
9. *To receive God's vision for our lives, we position ourselves*
 - a) *to the east.*
 - b) *by kneeling humbly.*
 - c) *by being persistent, bold, and committed to the Lord.*
10. *One benefit of having a vision from God is that*
 - a) *it will make you wealthy.*
 - b) *you will never get out of God's will again.*
 - c) *the vision encourages accountability, candidness, and debate.*

ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS

Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parenthesis.

1. *a (1.1)*
2. *c (1.1)*
3. *b (1.1)*
4. *b (1.1)*
5. *c (1.2)*
6. *c (1.2)*
7. *b (1.3)*
8. *b (1.3)*
9. *c (1.5)*
10. *c (1.4)*

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